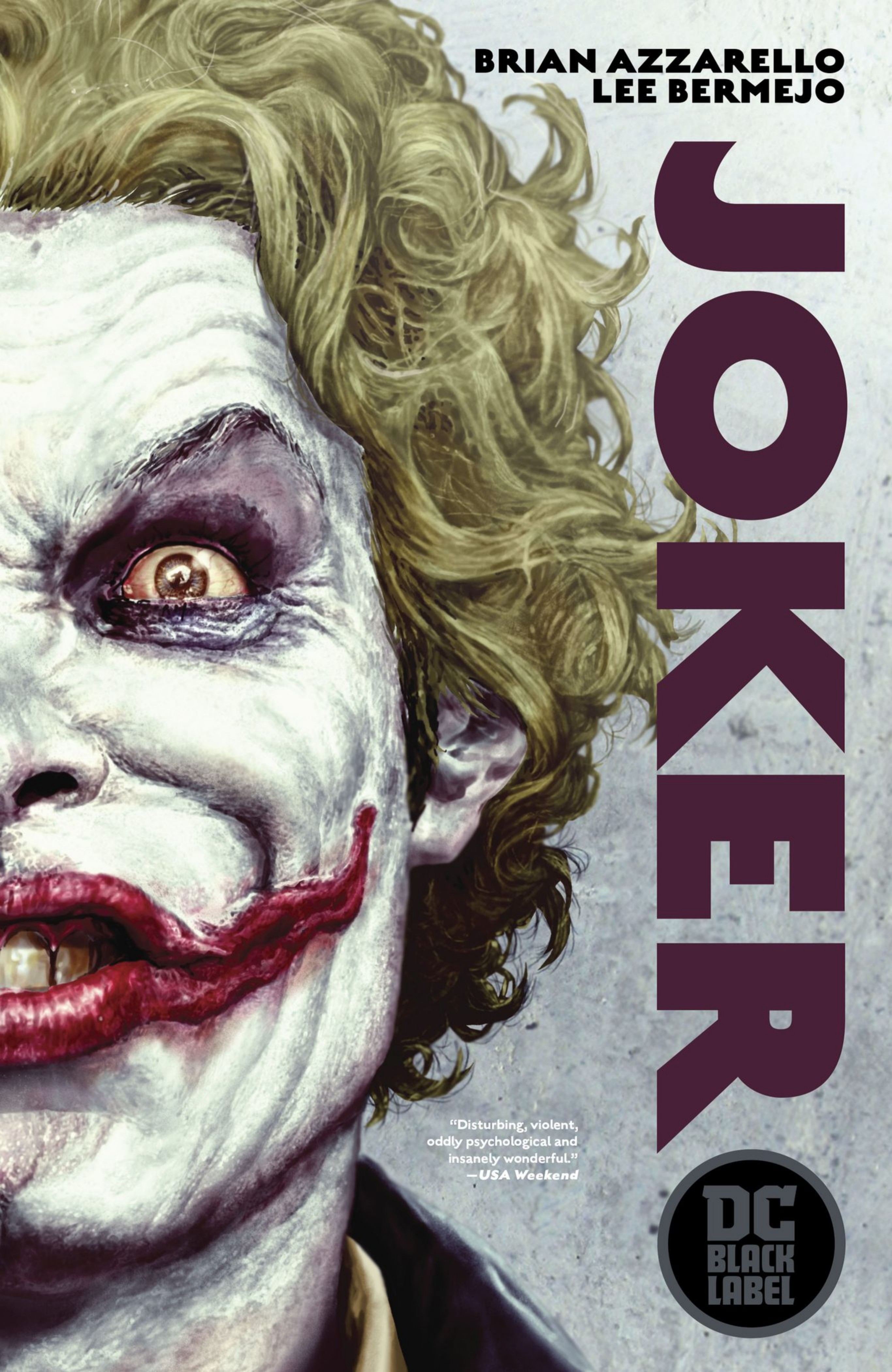




**BRIAN AZZARELLO
LEE BERMEJO**

LOK

"Disturbing, violent,
oddly psychological and
insanely wonderful."
—*USA Weekend*





J O K E R



JOKER

BRIAN AZZARELLO WRITER

LEE BERMEJO PENCILLER

MICK GRAY (PAGES 6-7, 9-17, 19, 21, 28-51, 54-69, 71-76, 78-118, 120, 122, 126)

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JOKER

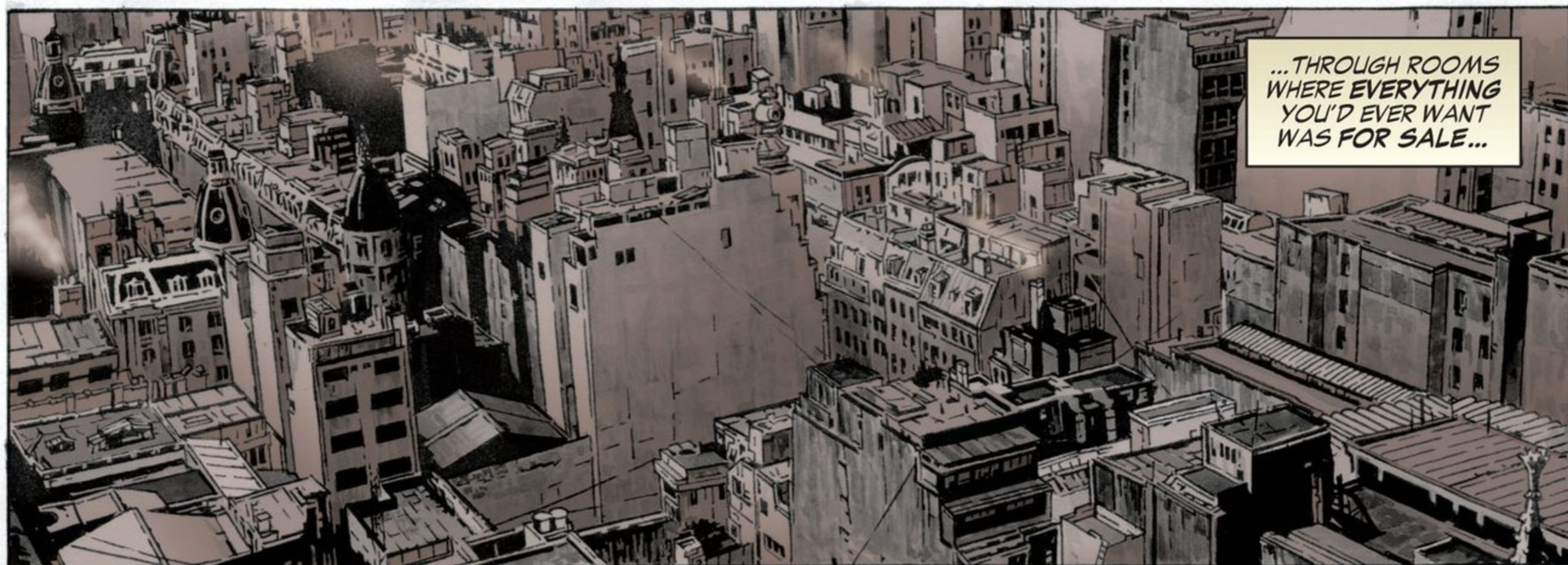
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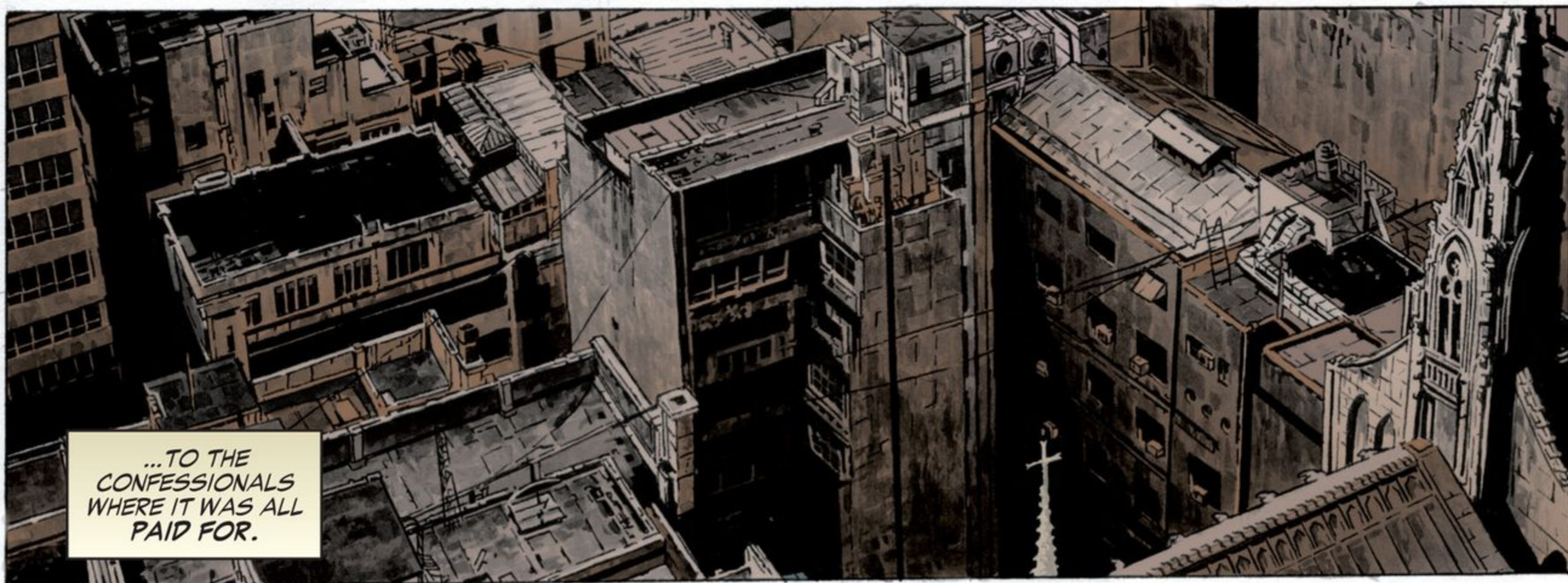
THE NEWS, WHEN IT
CAME, SPREAD FROM
THE BACK ALLEYS TO
THE SOCIAL CLUBS...



...THROUGH ROOMS
WHERE EVERYTHING
YOU'D EVER WANT
WAS FOR SALE...



...TO THE
CONFESSIONALS
WHERE IT WAS ALL
PAID FOR.



IT SPREAD LIKE
WILDFIRE-- OR
MORE APTLY PUT--
A DISEASE.





SOMEONE'S GOTTA GO GET 'M, MONTY.

THE GRINBARE AND it



THAT'S WHAT HE IS, I GUESS; A DISEASE THAT INFECTED GOTHAM CITY...

...OF WHICH THERE IS NO CURE.



OKAY. WHO?



IF NO ONE ELSE GOT THE STONES...



...I'LL DO IT.

HUH.

BE MY GUEST.





HE WAS A DISEASE THAT
SOMEHOW, WITH THE HELP OF GOD
OR THE DEVIL-- PICK YOUR POISON--
HAD CONVINCED HIS DOCTORS HE
WASN'T DISEASED ANYMORE.

THE NEWS SPREAD.
I DON'T KNOW THE
PARTICULARS--



--STILL DON'T
AS TO WHY, BUT
HE WAS...



...THE JOKER WAS BEING
RELEASED FROM ARKHAM
ASYLLUM.





HAVE TO ADMIT,
SEEIN' HIM IN PERSON
FOR THE FIRST TIME, I
FELT THAT INSTINCTUAL
"CLENCH"...



YOU
KNOW, "DOWN
THERE."



BUT THEN,
HE SALUTED
THE CITY...



WHICH PUT
MY MIND-- AMONG
OTHER THINGS-- AT
EASE.



AH...
I'M HERE TO...
AH, PICK YOU
UP.

AND
WHO ARE
YOU?

MONTY
SENT ME.



MY NAME'S
JONNY. JONNY
FROST.



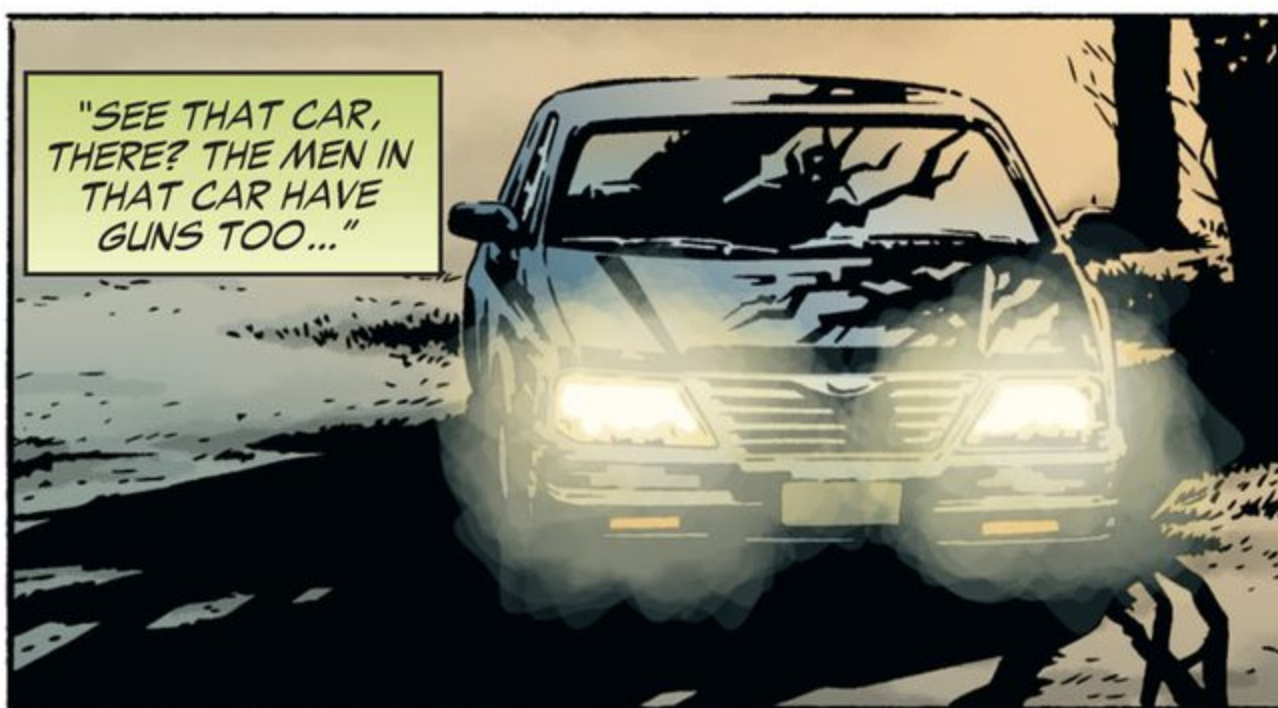
JONNY
JONNY FROST,
LET ME ASK YOU
A QUESTION...

...DO
YOU HAVE
A GUN?



YES
SIR...

YOU
NEED
IT?





THEY ARE
HERE TO PUT
ME DOWN.

OPEN
YOUR
TRUNK.



THAT
SHOVEL YOU
HAVE?

HOW'D
YOU--

WRAP IT IN
THE BLANKET
AND HAND IT
TO ME.



THANK
YOU.



I'LL RIDE
SHOTGUN.

THE MEN WITH GUNS
FOLLOWED US AT A
RESPECTFUL DISTANCE
AWAY FROM ARKHAM AND
ACROSS THE WAYNE
COUNTY BRIDGE.

WHEN WE
TURNED WEST,
AND THEY KEPT
GOING NORTH.

THEY
BLINKED.
HE...

...GIGGLED, OR
CLEARED THE PHLEGM
OUT OF HIS THROAT,
IT WAS HARD TO TELL.

THERE WAS A PLACE HE
WANTED TO STOP AT--
PLACE THAT FOR ANYONE
WHO WENT THERE, I'D HEARD
WAS THE STOPPING PLACE.

BY THAT I
MEAN, LIKE,
THE END OF
THE ROAD.

KNOCK
KNOCK

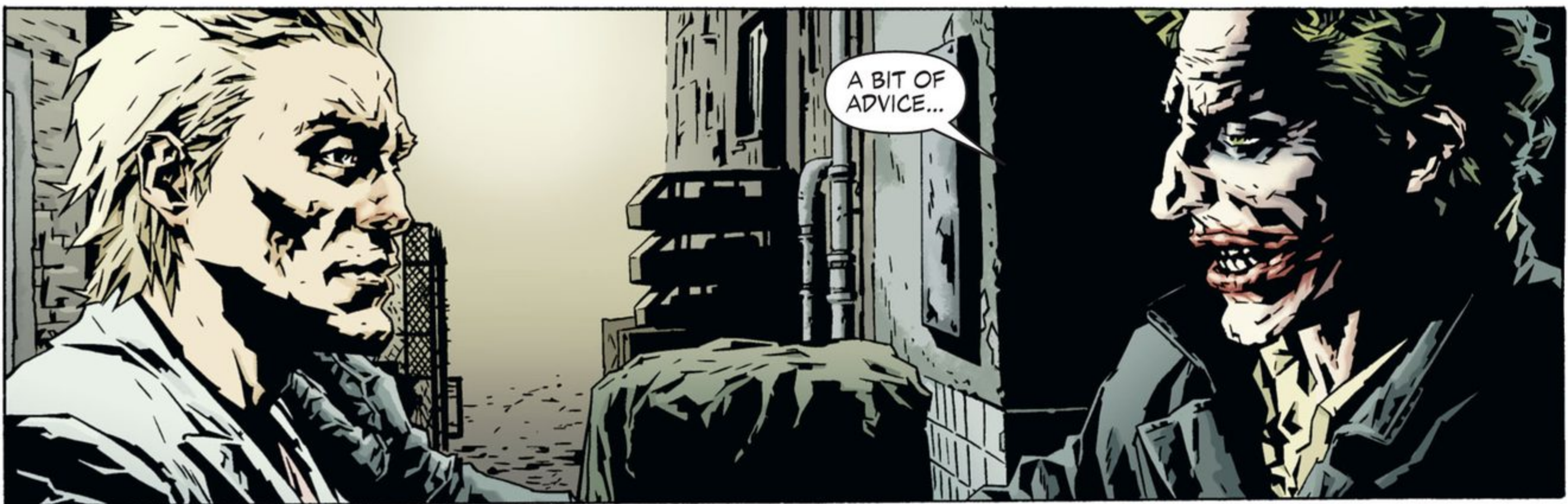
WHO'S
THERE?

JOE.

SSHUUCK

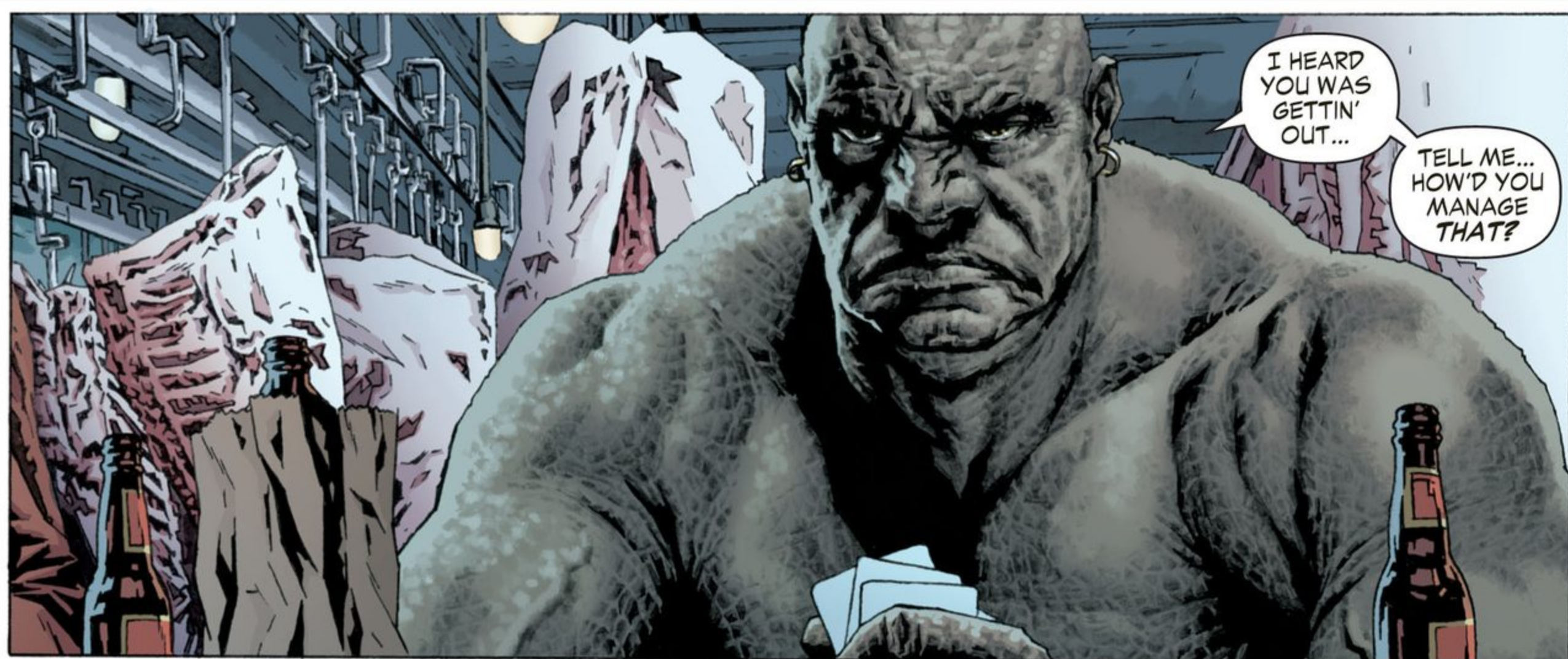
JOE WH--







JOKER...



I HEARD
YOU WAS
GETTIN'
OUT...

TELL ME...
HOW'D YOU
MANAGE
THAT?



AH...

NO.



SO WHAT
BRINGS YOU
'ROUND HERE?

CROC, C'MON...
I ALWAYS LIKE
TO SEE YOU.

WHY'S
THAT?



YOU
MAKE ME FEEL
HANDSOME.



HEH.



YOU WANT INTO THE GAME?

I DO, I DO, BUT...



HEH. HEARD THAT, TOO. NO RESPECT SHOWN, WHILE YOU WAS AWAY.

YOU BROKE?

NOTHING WE CAN'T FIX.

HEH.



SO WHAT NEEDS FIXIN'?

FIXIN'S... THOSE ARE SIDE DISHES...

YOU HUNGRY?

ALWAYS.



MY NAME, IS JONNY
FROST. YOU DON'T KNOW
ME, BUT ALL MY LIFE, I
KNEW YOU WOULD.

THAT I'D DO
SOMETHIN'-- BE
SOMEBODY--
THAT YOU'D KNOW,
AND TAKE NOTICE.



A BIG MAN.
FRONT ROW
SEATS, NICE
SUITS, MY OWN
BOOTH AT
THE TONIEST
RESTAURANT
IN TOWN.

SOMEBODY.



NOT SOME TWO-BIT
HOOD, HUSTLIN' SMALL
POTATOES WOULDN'T
SATISFY A STARVIN'
IRISHMAN.



WELL
LOOK WHO
IT IS...



WE DO?
WHAT'S THE
OCCASION?







BUT THIS...

WAS ONE HELL
OF A PARTY.



IT WASN'T
JUST OFF
THE HOOK...

IT TORE THE
HOOK OFF THE
WALL...



...AND THE
WALL OFF
THE HOUSE.

IT WAS
ALL ABOUT
RESPECT.

THE KIND I
WANTED.

YOU
FEELIN'
GOOD?

I'M
FEELIN'.

GOOD.

SO WHY'D
YOU BRING THEM
ANIMALS WITH
YA?

"I'LL ADMIT
THAT CROC HAS
A CERTAIN..."

"ECCENTRIC WAY
WITH EVIDENCE, BUT
THAT DOESN'T MAKE
HIM A... OOH..."

YOU SAID
ANIMALS.

MONTY, WE
SHOULD TALK ABOUT
WHAT'S HAPPENED WHILE
I'VE BEEN AWAY.

I KNOW YOU'D
RATHER WAIT FOR
TOMORROW, BUT
I'M ANTSY.



I DON' WAN' YOU THAT WAY, BOSS.

I KNOW.

SMACK

JONNY?



YEAH?

IN YOUR POCKET...

YOU HAVE A DOLLAR.



OFF THE DAMN SIDE OF THE CITY, MAN. JOKER, FREE. AND ME... JONNY FROST-- A NAME YOU KNOW NOW.



I'M NOT WHAT I WAS--
I'D SIGNED THAT AWAY
ON A DOTTED LINE...



A
SALUTE
TO MY
PAST.



FORGET THAT, I WAS
PART OF ONE HELL OF
A PARTY, I WAS--

JESUS H--







FRIENDS...



I'M VERY, VERY DISTRESSED.



YOU CAN SEE IT IN MY FACE, I'M SURE.



WHEN I WENT AWAY, I THOUGHT I WAS LEAVING MY CITY IN CAPABLE HANDS, BUT IT SEEMS **OTHER** HANDS HAVE TAKEN IT FROM ME.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT THESE OTHER HANDS DID? THEY LOOSENED THE BELT AROUND THEIR FAT WAISTS, AND TOOK A **DUMP**.

IN MY CITY... MY SANDBOX... MINE... GOTHAM BELONGS TO **ME**.



SO WHO HERE...



...WANTS TO
HELP ME TAKE
IT **BACK**?

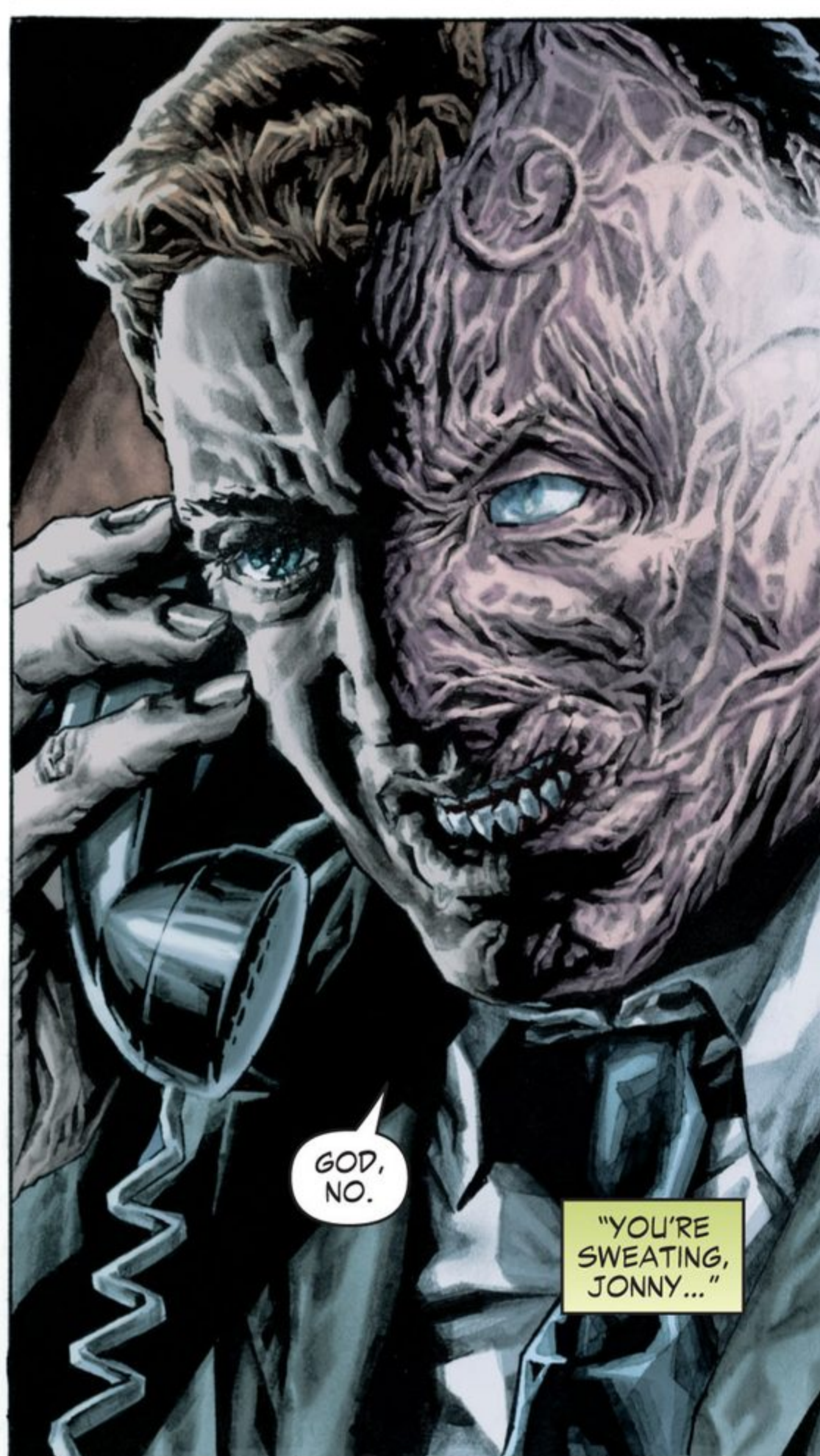


I DO.

JONNY DOES.



Ring
Ring





HUH? I AM?

...I'M A LITTLE HUNG OVER.

WE DID HANG THE CATS OUT TO DRY LAST NIGHT, DIDN'T WE?



I WOKE UP WITH THAT NOT-SO-FRESH FEELING MYSELF. YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD ME YOU WERE IN THE SAME STRAITS...

THE END IS NIGH!



HERE, STICK THESE IN YOUR HOLE.

JOKER, I CAN'T TAKE PILLS--



--WHY? THEY FIX THINGS. I'VE LIVED ON THEM FOR YEARS. YEARS.

YEARS. PILLS PILLS PILLS. THEY PRY OPEN YOUR MIND WITH FINGERS, AND...



...ARE YOU SAYING YER BETTER THAN ME?!



NO!-- I CAN'T SWALLOW 'EM DRY.



OH.

HERE.
HAIR OF THE
DOG.



HARLEY...



SWEET.



I'LL
BE RIGHT
BACK.

SWEATING...? YEAH, I WAS
SWEATING LIKE A NUN IN A
SALINA, AND BOOZE HAD
NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.



JOKER WAS BROKE. ALL
THE CASH, ALL HIS HOLDINGS,
HIS TERRITORY... EVERYTHING
HE HAD-- WAS GONE.

DIVVIED UP, BY MEN
WHO THOUGHT THEY'D SEEN
HIM FOR THE LAST TIME.



BUT RATHER THAN GO
AFTER THEM, HE DECIDED
TO ROB A BANK.



SO
YEAH, I WAS
SWEATING.



JONNY
FROST?



SIX MONTHS
AGO, I GOT
OUT OF THE
JOINT FOR THE
FIFTH TIME.



IT IS, LIKE THEY SAY; THE
FIRST BID IS THE WORST.
BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE...

IT'S JUST
THE FIRST.



SO I MADE A
PROMISE INSTEAD,
THE FIFTH WAS MY
LAST.

TOO MUCH
OF MY LIFE WAS
SPENT BEHIND
BARS.



...TOO MUCH.

SHELLY...



CHANGE
YER MIND ABOUT
ME, BABY?

BACK
OFF,
JONNY.



C'MON,
SHEL...

FER
OL' TIMES'
SAKE.



...
FOR OLD
TIMES.



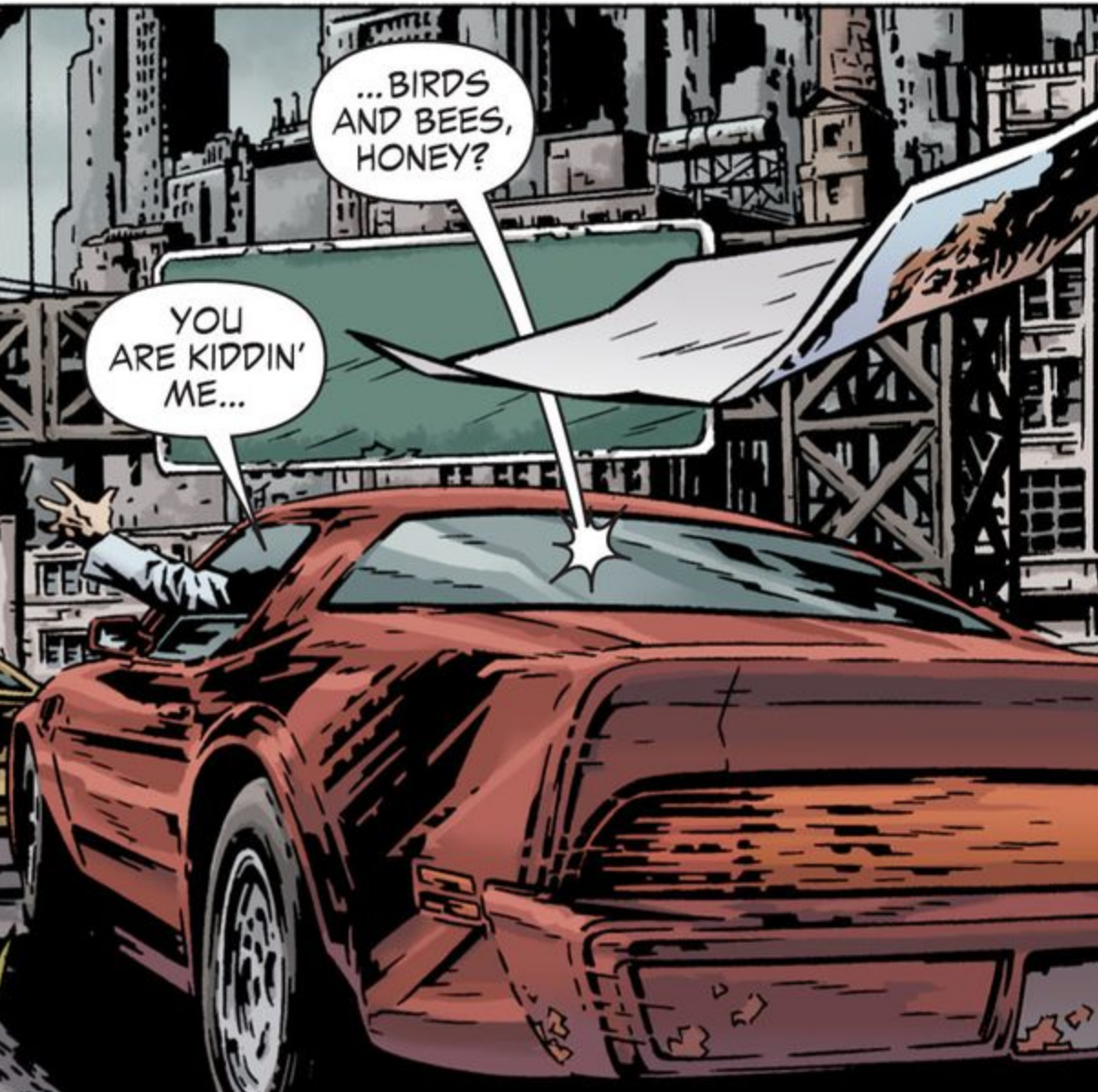
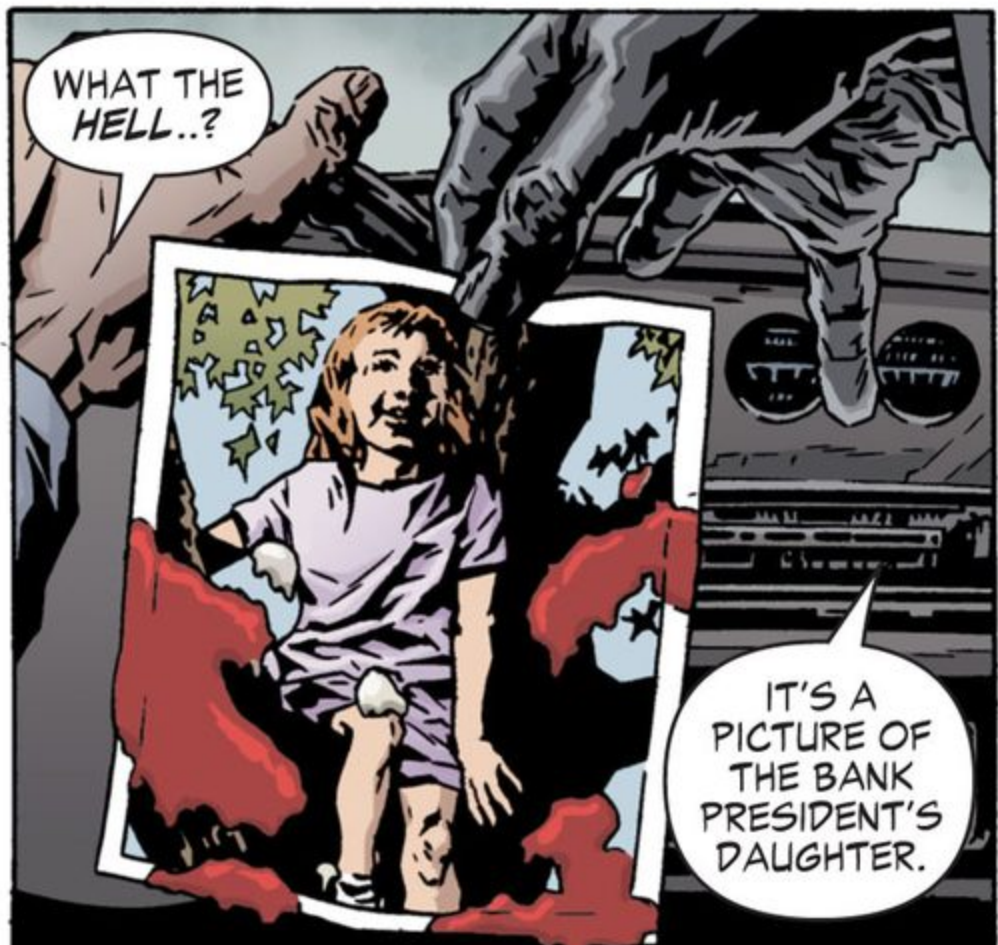
THE
DIVORCE
PAPERS.



HUH.
SHOUDA SENT YER
LAWYER.







AND DRIVE I DID.
'CAUSE ONE THING I
GOT-- IS DRIVE. FIRST
TO A SPORTING GOODS
STORE, OF ALL PLACES.

DIDN'T TAKE
JOKER FOR MUCH
OF A SPORTSMAN,
BUT HELL...









RHALUK



SHOW HIM
WHAT'S IN THE
BAG, JONNY.



YOU KNOW
WHAT *THAT*
IS, ABNER?

GRRK
GRRK

EXACTLY--
NOT
ENOUGH.



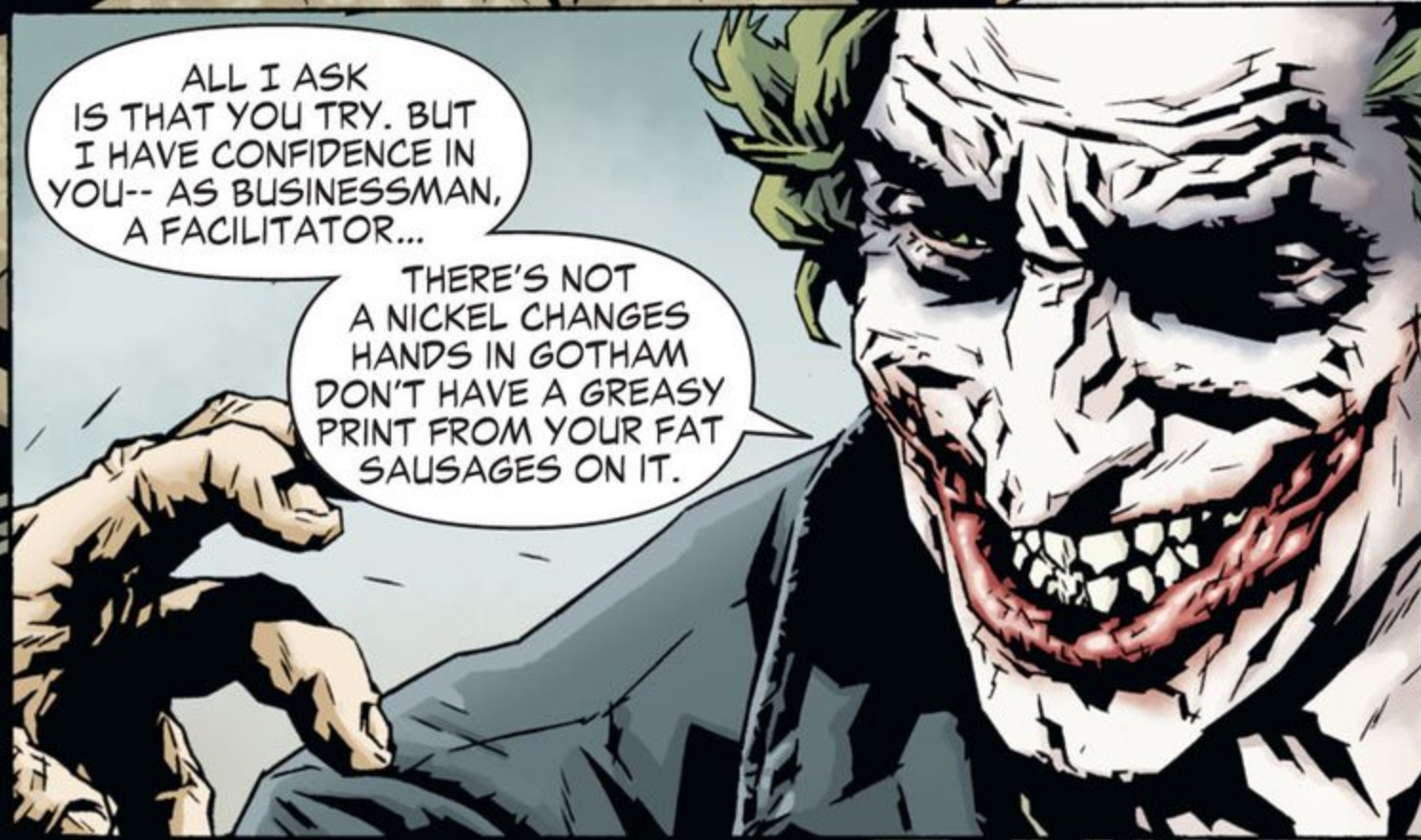
GHHHH



BUT
IT'S ALL I
HAVE.

I'D LIKE
YOU TO INVEST
IT FOR ME.

LOOKING FOR
A HIGH YIELD, SAY,
TEN TIMES AS
MUCH. QUICK TURN-
AROUND, TOO. YOU
CAN DO?



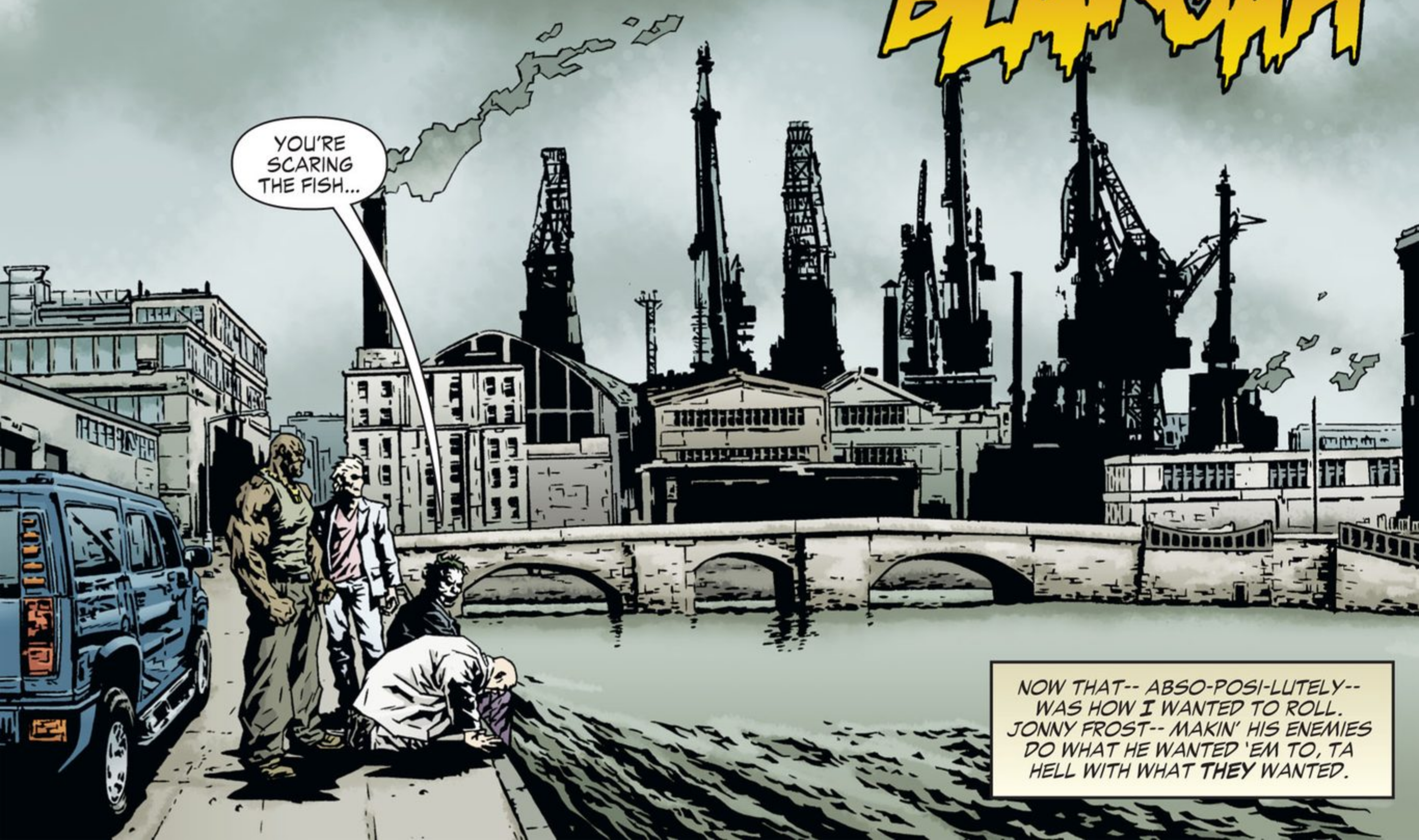
ALL I ASK
IS THAT YOU TRY. BUT
I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN
YOU-- AS BUSINESSMAN,
A FACILITATOR...

THERE'S NOT
A NICKEL CHANGES
HANDS IN GOTHAM
DON'T HAVE A GREASY
PRINT FROM YOUR FAT
SAUSAGES ON IT.



YUM
YUM, HUH
CROC?

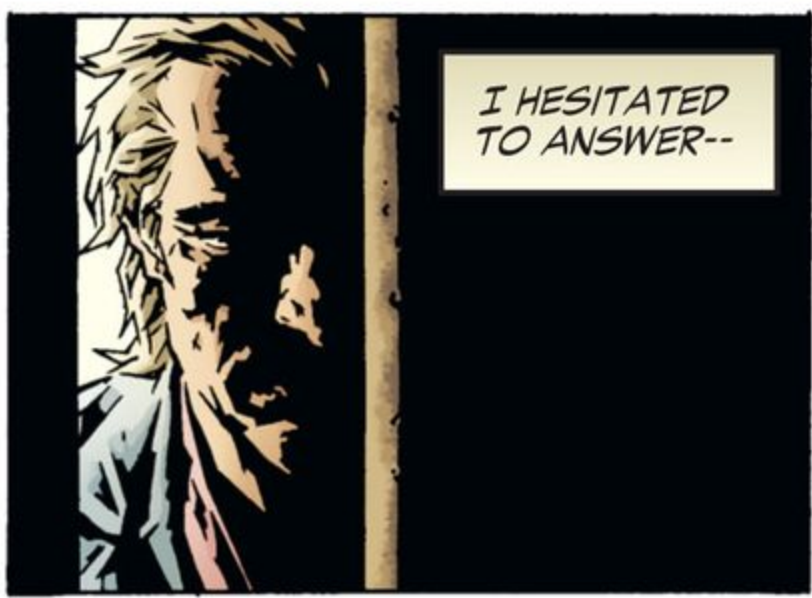
WE
HAVE A *DEAL*,
ABNER?



NOW THAT-- ABSO-POSI-LUTELY--
WAS HOW I WANTED TO ROLL.
JONNY FROST-- MAKIN' HIS ENEMIES
DO WHAT HE WANTED 'EM TO, TA
HELL WITH WHAT THEY WANTED.



JOKER HAD ME TAKE HIM AN' HIS LADY BACK TO THEIR CRIB. AS THEY WERE GETTING OUT OF MY RIDE, HE ASKED ME IF THERE WAS ANYTHING AT MY OWN I HAD TO HAVE.



I HESITATED TO ANSWER--



MY MISTAKE WAS HESITATIN'.



THEN HE GAVE ME A SQUEEZE, AND STRESSED THAT-- ONLY WHAT YOU HAVE T'HAVE-- THEN' WALK AWAY.

I SAID SURE. I UNDERSTOOD I WOULD BE STAYIN' WITH HIM NOW.



YOU PULL THAT...

I'LL DROP YOU WHERE YOU STAND, SCUMBAG.



YOU MUST BE A COP.

WHY MUST I BE?



'CAUSE ONLY COPS CALL PEOPLE SCUMBAGS. PEOPLE REFER TO PEOPLE BY OTHER WORDS.



Divorce Document

This is a divorce document that states that Jonny is being divorced by his wife and that he will not be able to visit his kids.

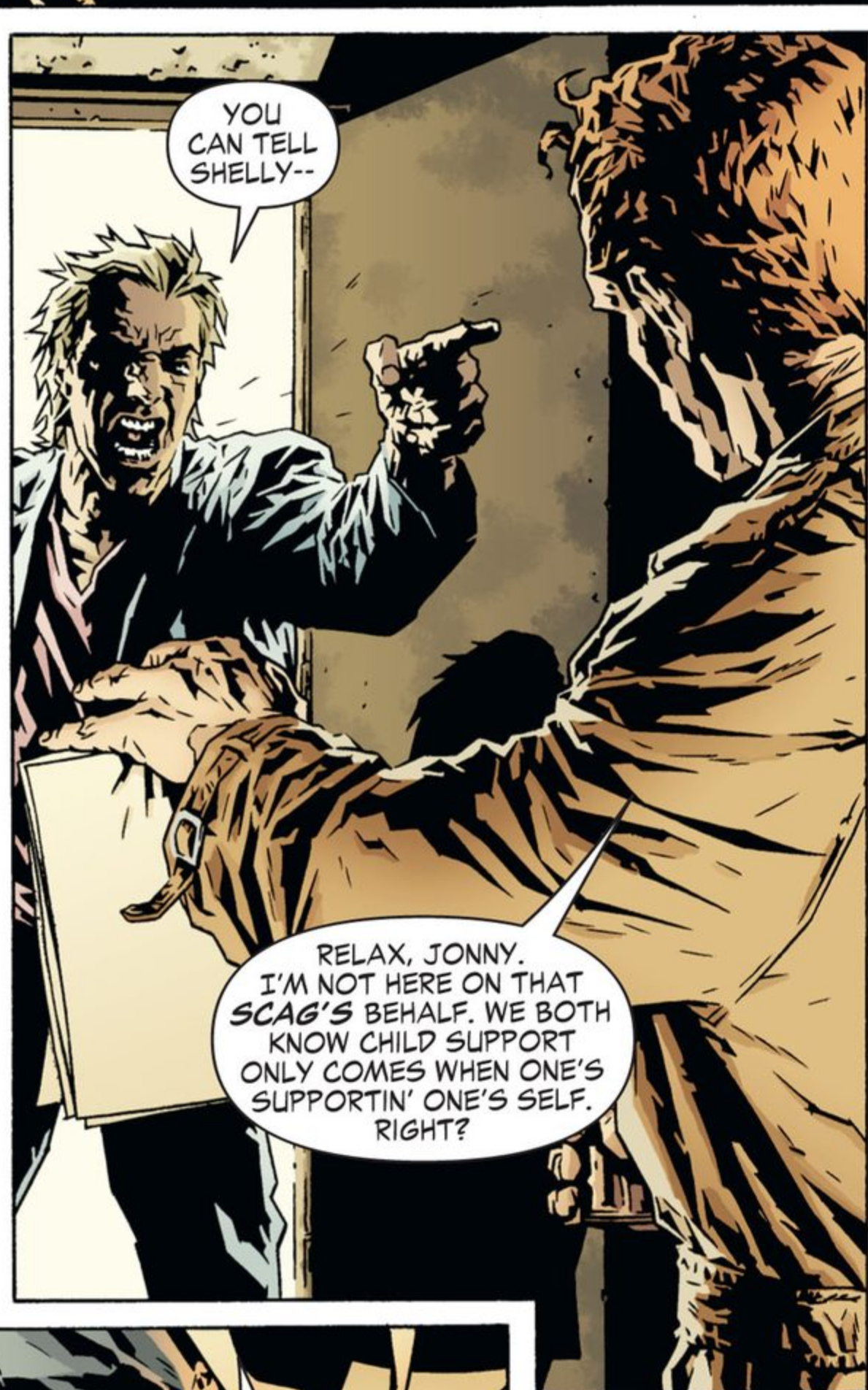
Wife signature here: _____

Lawyer signature: waved

I hereby agree to the terms of this Divorce and will abide by them according to Gotham City and U.S. Government Law.

Jonny signature here: _____

Official Gotham City document.





WHAT?--
THAT'S IT?



NO-- YOU
GOT A REGISTRATION
FOR THAT PIECE YER
CARRYIN'?

I...



JUST
PLAYIN'.



SEE
YOU NEXT
TIME.



I TOOK
NOTHING.

I WALKED
AWAY, LIGHT AS
A FEATHER...





...ON TOP OF
THE WORLD.

IT'S ALL
SET UP, JOKER.
TOMMY BANG BANG
WILL MEET WITH US.
THOUGH--IF YOU DON'T
MIND ME SAYING--LETTING
HIM KNOW WE'RE COMING
COULD MEAN WE'RE
WALKING INTO
A SETUP.



I DON'T MIND
YOU SAYING THAT,
JONNY. SOMETIMES,
I NEED TO HEAR THE
OBVIOUS...



NOW IS
NOT ONE OF
THOSE TIMES,
THOUGH...



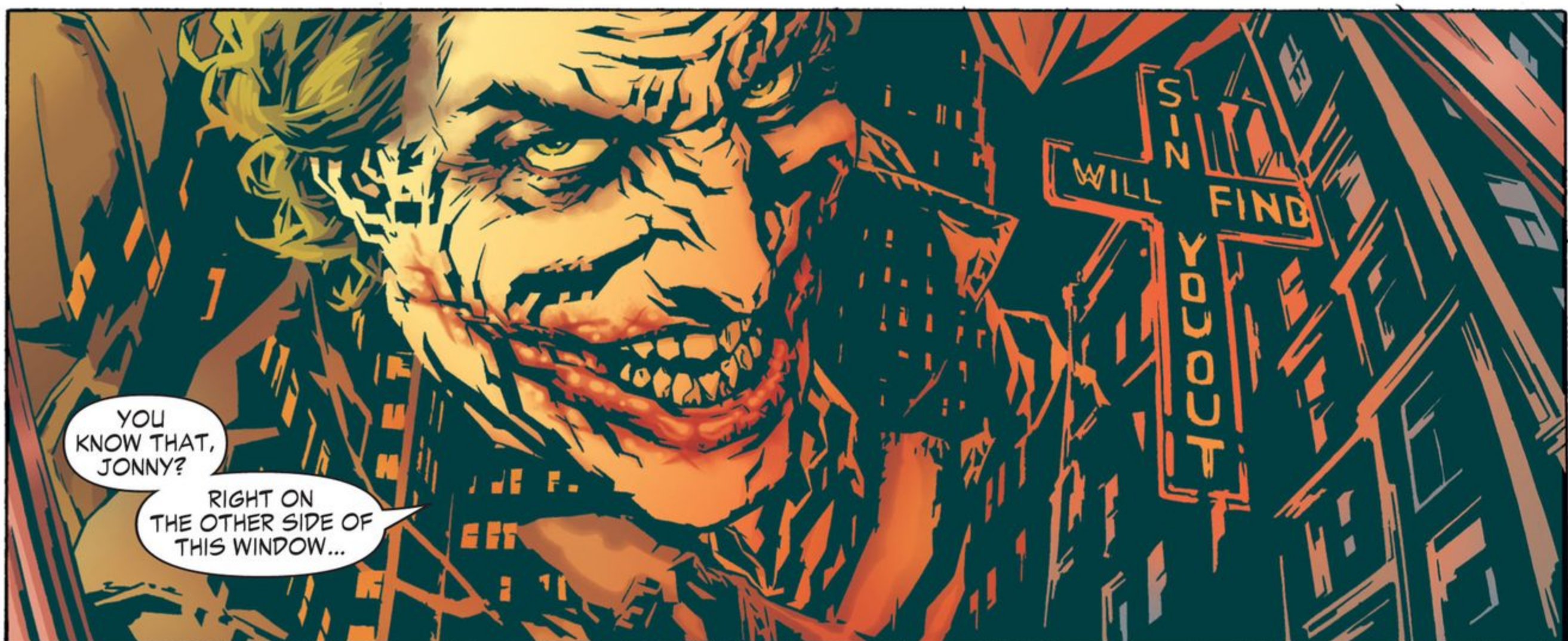
LOOK
OUT THE WINDOW,
JONNY JONNY...



...TELL ME
WHAT YOU
SEE...



I SEE
LIGHTS.





...WATCHING
ME.

LET'S GO
TO WORK.



WORK.
I GOT INTO THIS
BUSINESS TO
AVOID IT.



THERE'S
THE RUB--IT IS A
BUSINESS. YOU NEVER
KNOW IT, AT FIRST--GETTIN'
THAT FREE TASTE IN THE
ALLEY CHOKING WHORES
FOR MILK MONEY.







I
DO. LOOK--
JOKER...



WHEN YOU WENT
DOWN, THINGS... IT
WASN'T MY CALL, BUT
I TOOK A PIECE.

A BELL



YOU WOULD
HAVE BEEN A FOOL
NOT TO.

YEAH...
YEAH!



I GOT
THE GARBAGE ON
THE EASTSIDE, AN'
SHAKE DOWNS
TOO.

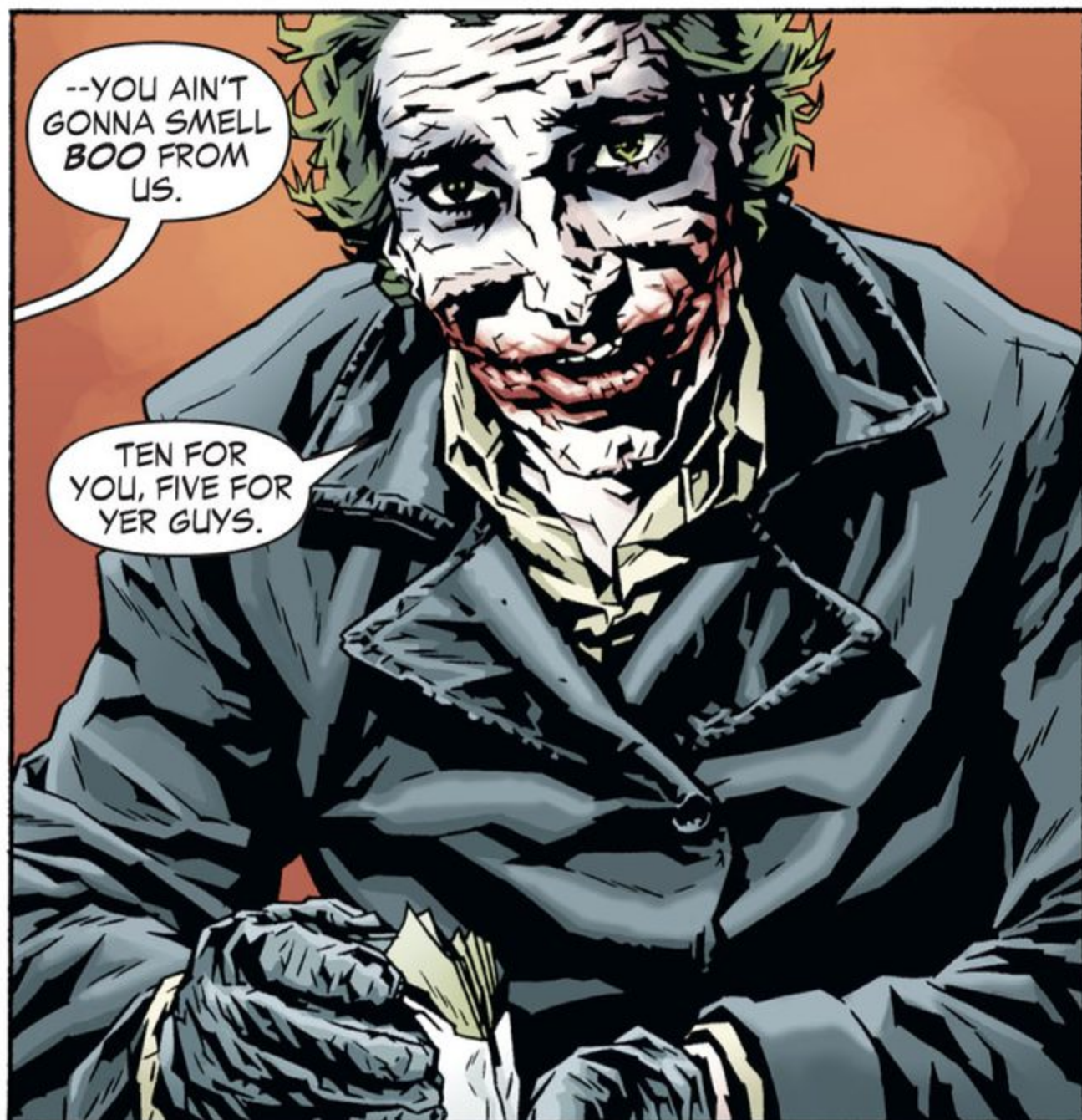
THAT'S ALL. IT'S
YERS AGAIN. I WAS
JUST KEEPIN' IT
WARM.



CLICK



HERE'S
YOUR CUT.





THAT WENT
PRETTY GOOD,
HUH, BOSS?

DID
IT?

START THE CAR,
JONNY... I GOTTA
GO BACK IN...

I
FORGOT TO DO
SOMETHING...



TOMMY?

BANG
BANG



TEN PERCENT
IS NOW OFF THE
TABLE.

FIVE--FOR THE TIME
BEING-- STILL STANDS,
GENTLEMEN...





I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
HE WAS
THINKING...



OR IF
HE EVEN
WAS.

JOKER, I WAS
LEARNIN'... WASN'T
ABOUT THINKIN'...



...BUT
ALL ABOUT
DOIN'.



AND ALWAYS HIMSELF.
I SUPPOSE ONE COULD
SAY THAT THING ABOUT "IF
YOU WANT A JOB DONE
RIGHT" ...



OR MAYBE
IT WAS HE ENJOYED
THE...



...WORK? EVEN TOOK
PRIDE IN IT, LIKE AN
ARTIST. NOT THAT I
KNOW FROM ART,
BUT AS ANOTHER
SAYING GOES...

"I
KNOW
WHAT I
LIKE."



AND I WAS LIKIN' THIS.
WELL, NOT SO MUCH THE
"THIS," BUT DEFINITELY
BEING ON THE SIDE THAT
WAS DOIN' IT.



TOMMY WAS ONLY
THE BEGINNING. OVER
THE NEXT SEVERAL
DAYS A NUMBER OF
GOTHAM'S MID-LEVEL
BOSSSES TURNED UP
FACE DOWN...

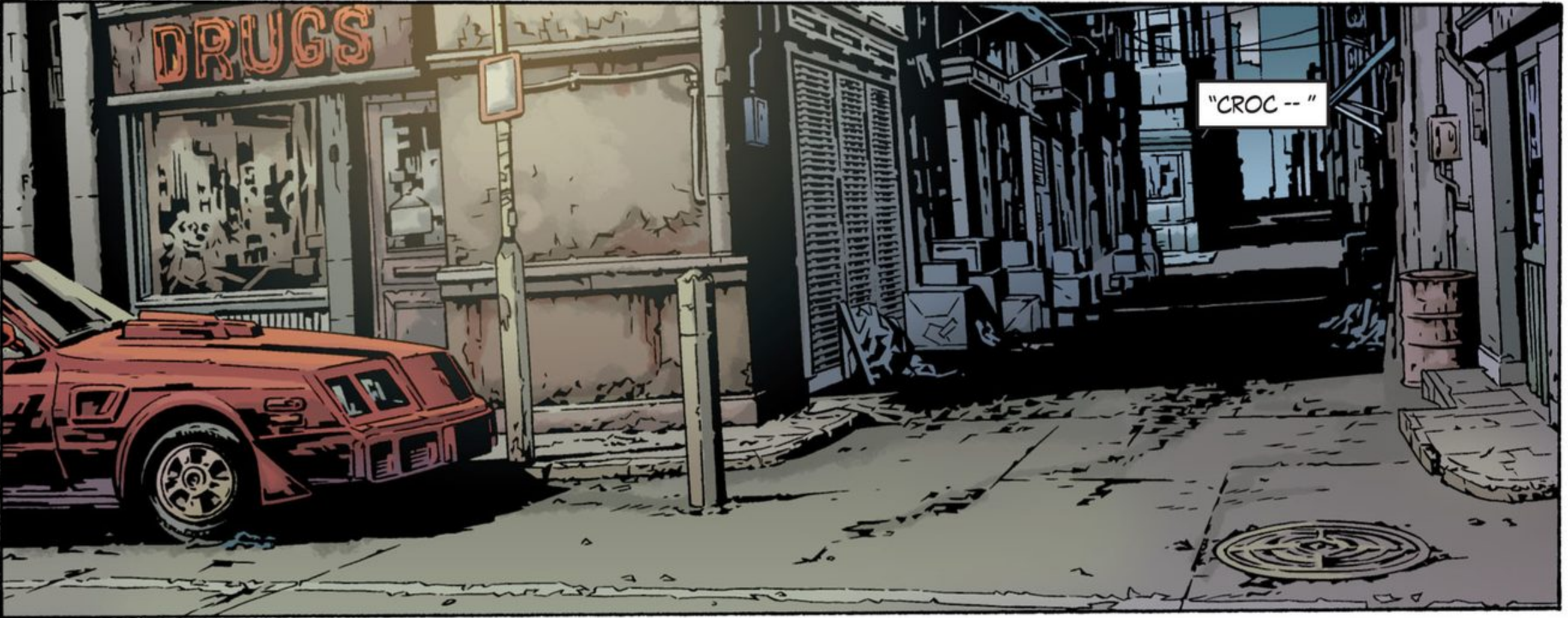
OTHERS NEVER
TURNED UP
AGAIN.



AND FOR THE
FIRST TIME IN MY
LIFE, JONNY FROST
KNEW WHERE ALL
THE BODIES WERE
BURIED.



THAT KINDA
POWER, BY THE
SHORT HAIRS.





NO,
BITCH, I
AIN'T.



CROC...DON' DO
THIS--YOU KNOW WHO I
WORK FOR...

YOU SERIOUS?
YOU THINK YOU A
WORKER?



DAMN... YOU
GOT NO IDEA,
DO YA?



I'M
WORKIN'.
YOU?...



HANG
TIGHT.

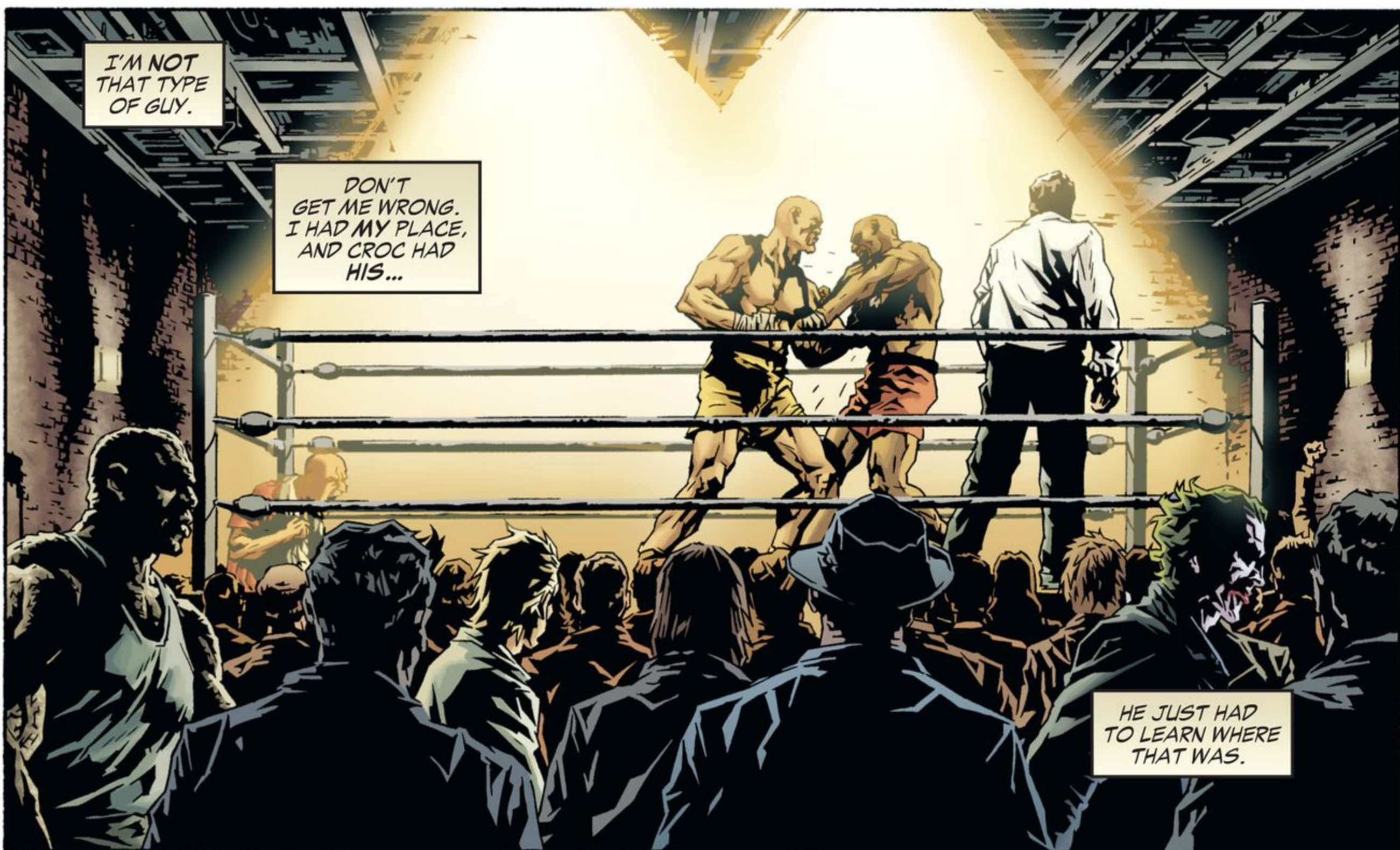
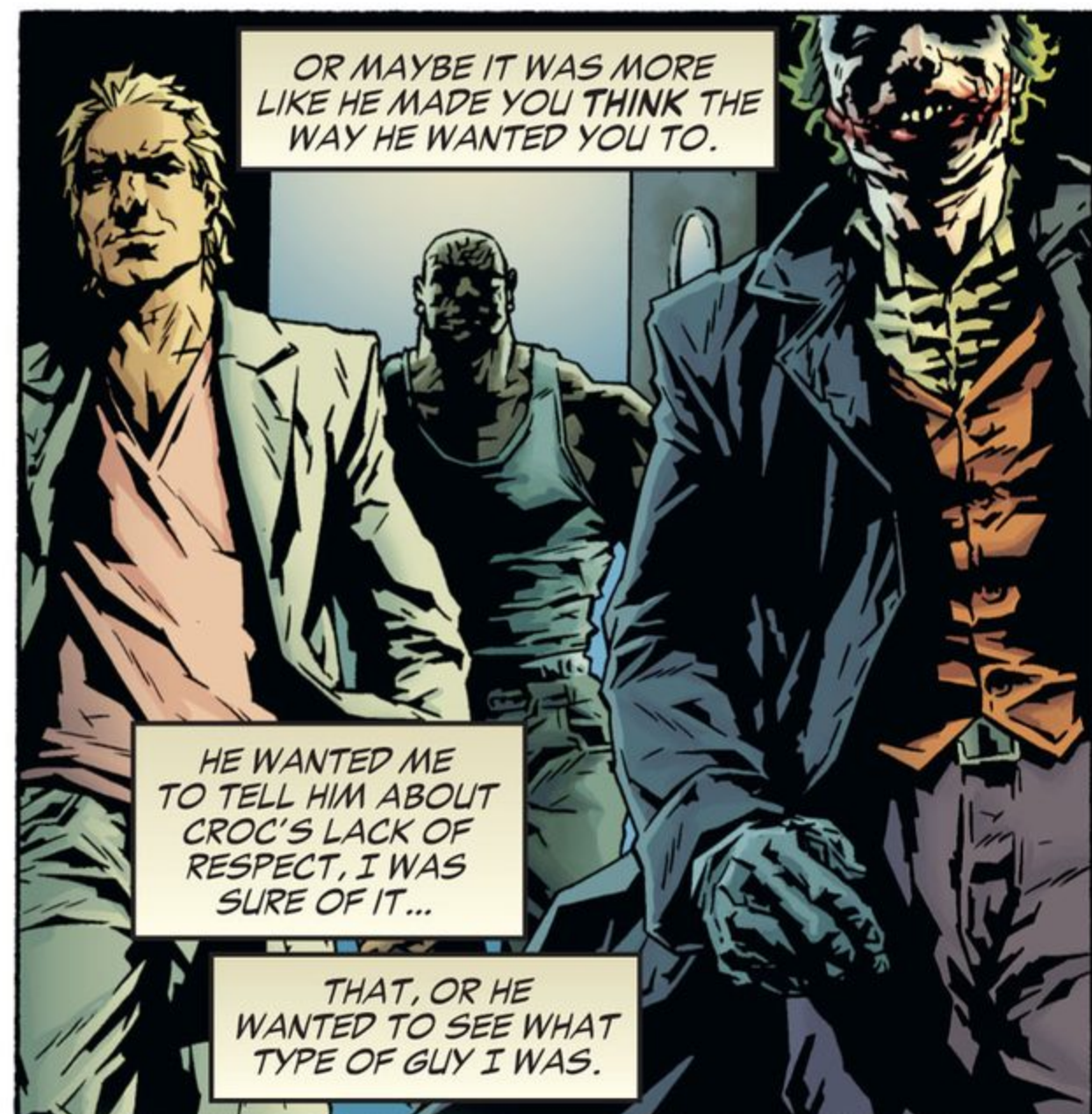
WE LEAVE
WHEN I SAY
I'M DONE.



THAT
BE COO' WIT'
THE MAN?













HARVEY'S
MAD?

WHICH
ONE?

HA!



YOU THINK
THAT'S FUNNY,
ABNER?



I THINK
IT'S A FAIR
QUESTION.

I DON'T
KNOW HOW
TO ANSWER
IT...



WE'LL LET ME TELL
YOU *HOW*, BECAUSE
I KNOW PSYCHOSIS
LIKE THE BACK OF
MY HAND...

HARVEY'S HEAD... IT'S A
BRAND NEW SPORTS CAR-- OR A
BEATER, DEPENDING HOW YOU
LOOK AT IT.



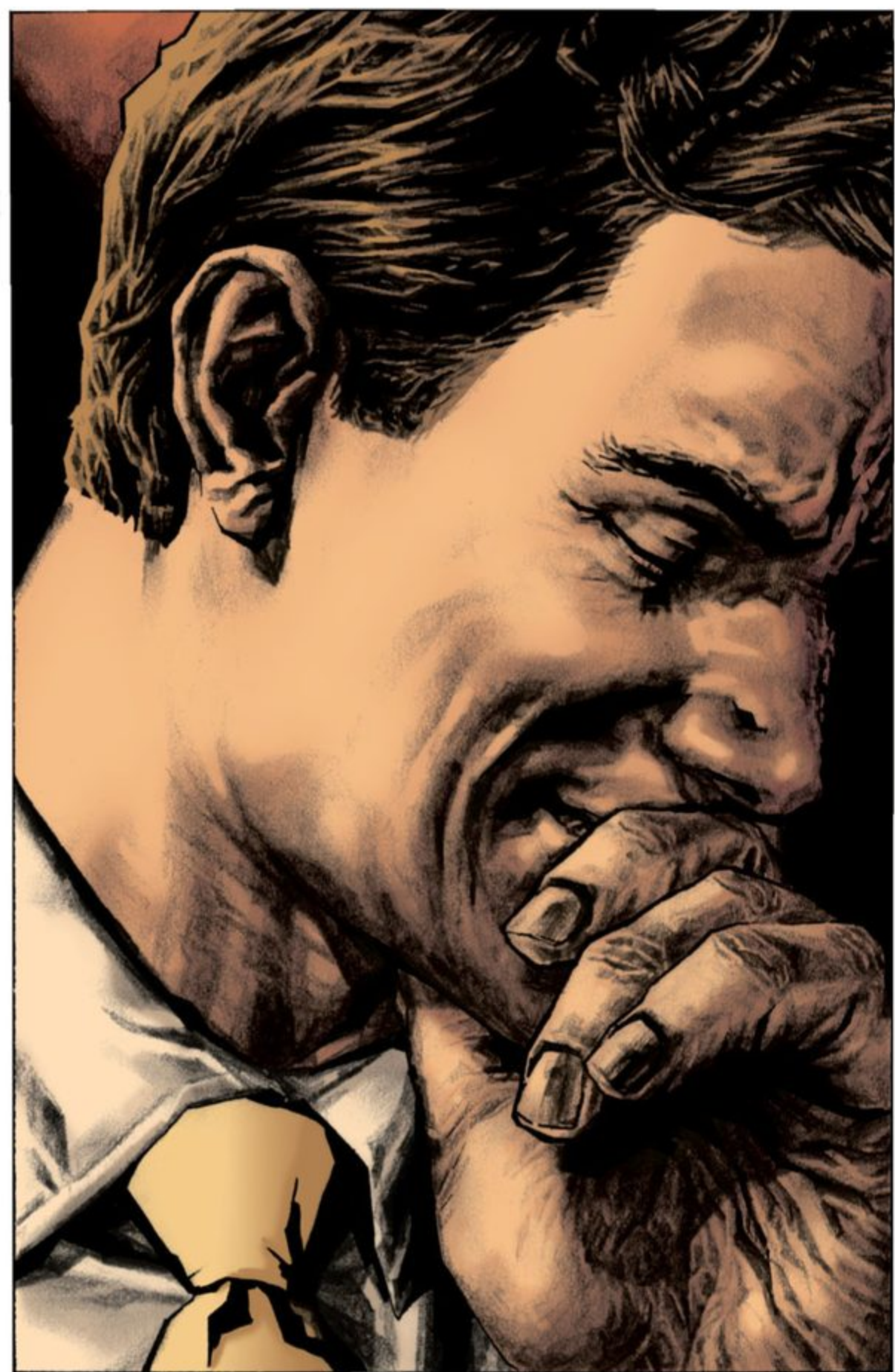
AND THIS CAR, IT
HAS *TWO* OWNERS-- NOT
VERY CREATIVE OWNERS
EITHER--



--SINCE THEY COULDN'T
COME UP WITH *SEPARATE*
GODDAMN NAMES WHEN
THE OPPORTUNITY
PRESENTED ITSELF.



"...I MIGHT GET
LUCKY AND GET THE
OTHER ONE."









WHAT THE
HELL YOU DOIN',
JOKER?



ISN'T ANYONE
LISTENING TO WHAT
I HAVE TO SAY?



WE SHOULD
GO... IS A
EPISODE.

NONONO--
DON'T GO!--



HAVE A
DRINK.

C'MON,
HUH?



HUH?



TWO AGAINST
ONE, EH, HARVEYS?
THAT'S THE WAY
YOU WANT TO
PLAY GOTHAM?

KRICK
CHERK
SPURT.



OKAY.
OKAY.
THEN.



BOYS--



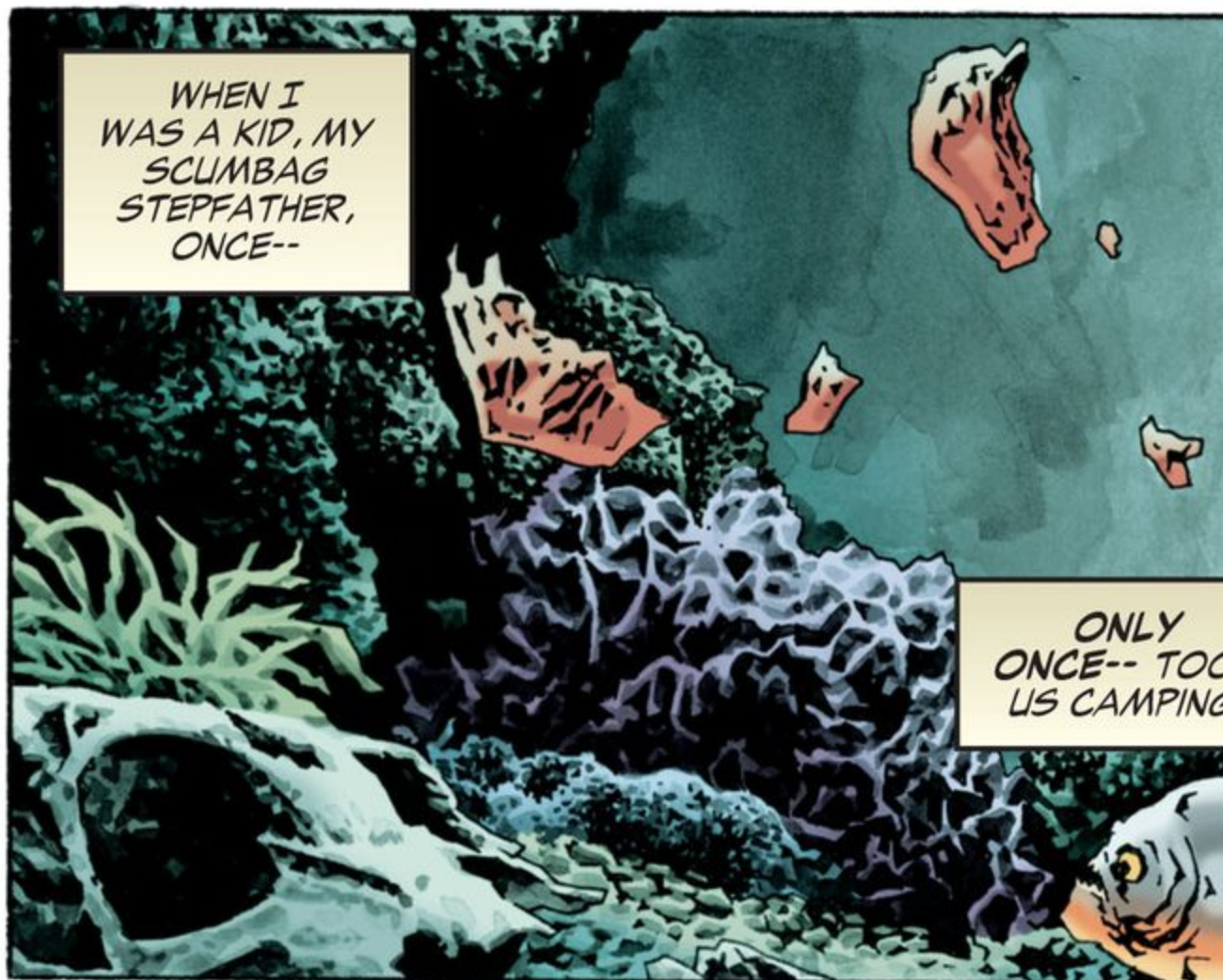
"WE SHOULD GO."



WHY HE DID THEN.
WHAT HE DID, MADE SENSE
TO NOBODY THERE.



NOBODY
BUT ME.



WHEN I
WAS A KID, MY
SCUMBAG
STEPFATHER,
ONCE--

ONLY
ONCE-- TOOK
US CAMPING.



I'D NEVER BEEN OUT IN
THE WOODS BEFORE, AND
I HAVEN'T BEEN THERE
SINCE, REALLY.

BUT THE TIME WITH
MY STEPFATHER,
I CAUGHT A TOAD,
AND I TOOK HIM
HOME IN A BOX.

AFTER IT RAINED, I'D TAKE HIM UP ON THE ROOF
OF OUR BUILDING TOO. SEEIN' IT WAS OUTSIDE, I
FIGURED HE'D LIKE TO HOP AROUND UP THERE, AND
I THINK HE REALLY DID. I LIKE TO THINK THAT.



I FED HIM BUGS THAT
I'D CATCH... ROACHES
MOSTLY, SINCE THAT'S
WHAT WE HAD, MOSTLY.



BUT THIS
ONE TIME...



THERE WERE
OLDER KIDS UP
THERE, AND THEY
SAW WHAT I
HAD...



AND THEY SAID THEY
WERE GOING TO THROW MY
TOAD OFF THE ROOF. AND
THEY WERE, I KNEW IT, AND
I ALSO KNEW I COULDN'T
LET THEM DO THAT.



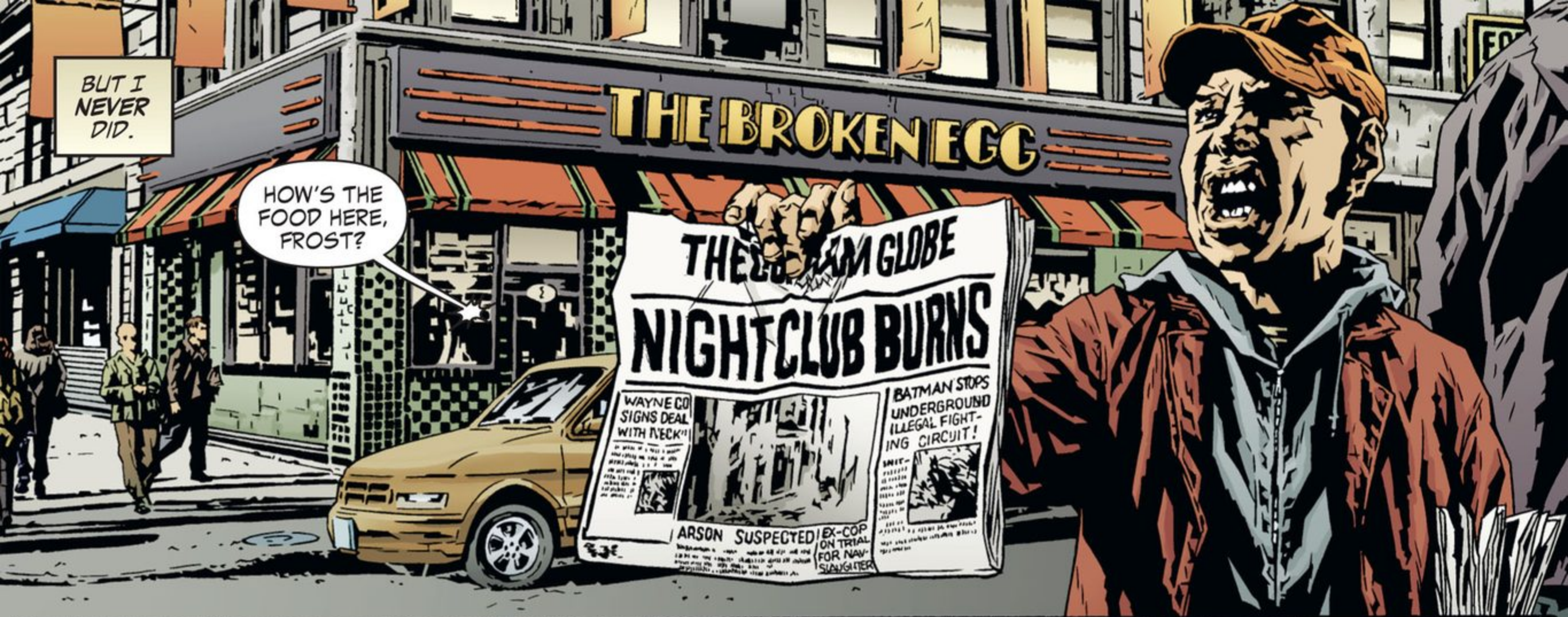
TO ME.



SO I DID
IT MYSELF.



AFTER, I WENT
DOWN TO THE
STREET, TO FIND
IT. I LOOKED
EVERYWHERE...







YOU KNOW
YOU ARE INVOLVED
WITH A *SICK MAN*
WHO WILL SEE
YOU *DIE*?

HE WILL STAND
OVER *YOUR BODY*,
WITH *YOUR BLOOD*
ON HIS HANDS AND
I PROMISE YOU HE
WILL LAUGH...

NOT BECAUSE
YOUR LIFE MEANS
NOTHING TO
HIM--



BUT
BECAUSE
DEATH, FOR
HIM--

IS
THE *PUNCH*
LINE.





A VERY SICK MAN.
A *DISEASE*, THAT THIS
CITY CAN'T AFFORD TO
CATCH AGAIN.



DO YOU
UNDERSTAND WHAT
I'M TELLING
YOU?

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND *WHY*
YOU ARE...



I'M HOPING,
MISTER
FROST, THAT
YOU *WILL*.

WHEN
THE TIME
COMES.



"FOR SOME
REASON, THE SICK
MAN *TRUSTS*
YOU.

"WE'D
LIKE TO AS
WELL..."



I DON'T
REMEMBER
LEAVING HARVEY
DENT'S OFFICE.



I MUST'VE WALKED.
MY LEGS ACHED FROM
WALKING. WALKED, AND
KEPT WALKING...



ALL THE WAY UP TO
THE TOP OF THE
WORLD.

I STAYED THERE
ALL DAY. JUST...
STAYED.



TOO LONG. I DON'T
KNOW WHY, MAYBE IT
WAS BECAUSE...

IT WAS THE
LAST PLACE I
WANTED TO BE.

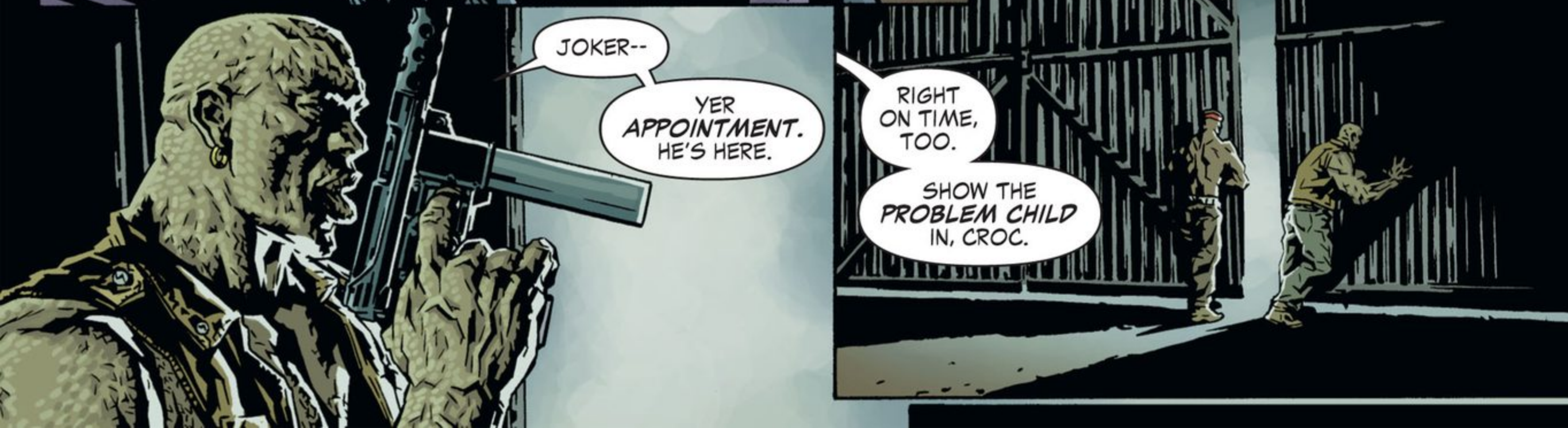
YOU'RE
LATE.

THAT A
PROBLEM?

JONNY
JONNY...

I DON'T
HAVE ANY
PROBLEMS.

WHAM



"JOKER, YOU...
YOU EXPECT SOME
TROUBLE OUT OF
THIS GUY?"

"NO. BUT I DO
EXPECT YOU TO,
JONNY."

THAT'S
WHY I KEEP YOU
AROUND.

HOLA,
EDWARD.

JOKER.



MMM...

WHEN THE WORLD IS
AGAINST YOU, WHERE'S
THE SAFEST PLACE
TO HIDE?





STUMPED.

HEHEHE
HEHHEH.

I DON'T
GET YOU, EDWARD.
YER MOTIVATIONS-- YOU'RE
WISE, BUT YOUR WHY'S ARE
COMPLETELY LOST
ON ME.



STRANGE,
HOW THAT SOUNDS,
ISN'T IT?



YOU
MIGHT CALL
IT PUZZLING.

SHALL WE
GET DOWN TO
BUSINESS?



WHAT DO
YOU PLAN TO DO
WITH THAT?



MY
BUSINESS.



AH. GETTING
EVERYONE'S
ATTENTION.



I COULD
CARE LESS ABOUT
ANYONE ELSE'S.

HOW
DID YOU
ACQUIRE--

IT WAS SUPPOSED
TO BE IMPOSSIBLE
TO STEAL...



SO I
STOLE
IT.

LET'S
DO THIS
AGAIN.



EDWARD--
IF I WERE YOU--
I'D GET OUT
OF TOWN.



JOKER,
IF I WERE
YOU--

--YOU'D
KNOW THAT THE
SAFEST PLACE
TO HIDE...



IS IN
SANITY.



THE DEAL WITH THE RIDDLER
WENT OFF WITHOUT A HITCH...

THAT IS, IF YOU
DIDN'T COUNT THE
ONE IN HIS HIP.



THAT HAD PUT JOKER IN A
GOOD MOOD, WHICH WAS
GOOD FOR EVERYONE.

I'D REALIZED, HIS
MOOD WAS LIKE THE
WEATHER...



IT HAD THAT
TYPE OF PERSUASIVE
EFFECT ON EVERYONE IT
TOUCHED. SUNNY DAYS
AHEAD, RIGHT?



TURNED OUT TO
BE JUST THE CALM
BEFORE THE STORM.

RAT RAT AT AT AT AT AT
- AT AT

WHEN IT HIT-- AND
GODDAMN DID IT HIT--
I THOUGHT I WAS DEAD.
IF NOT FER THE NOISE--
SHATTERING AND RINGING
IN MY EARS, I WOULD
HAVE BET I WAS.

SKREEECH

I WOULD HAVE LOST
THAT BET. BUT IT
WAS A BIGGER ONE
THAT I WAS ON THE
WRONG END OF.

I ALWAYS THOUGHT
THAT IN THAT TYPE OF
SITUATION, I'D GIVE
AS GOOD AS I'D GET.

RUNCH

THAT I WAS THE
KIND A' GUY WHO WENT
DOWN SWINGING.

AND IT'S TOUGH
WHEN YOU LEARN
FROM YOURSELF
THAT YER NOT.

IT MAKES YOU
WONDER ABOUT
OTHER THINGS YOU
BELIEVE TO BE TRUE
ABOUT YOU.





I GUESS THAT'S TRUE.

THEY SAY THERE'S NO HONOR AMONG THIEVES.

BLAM
BLAM

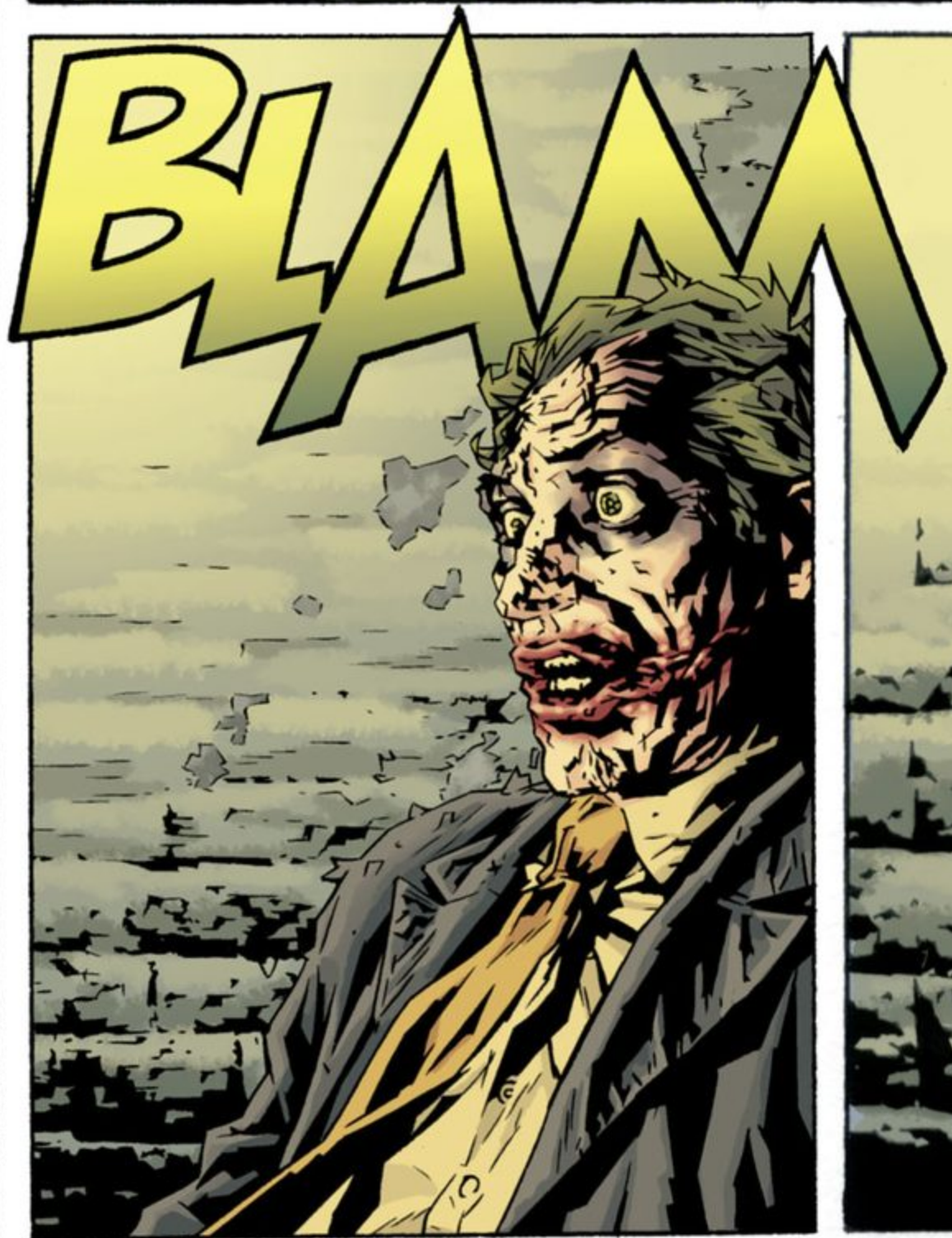


BUT IS THAT EXCLUSIVE TO THIEVES?

MAYBE THERE'S JUST NO HONOR, PERIOD.



I'D SAY YER UNDER ARREST...





DENT WOULDN'T BE
HAPPY. I KNEW THAT.
AND I CARED ABOUT
IT. HIS TIME CAME...



FOR
ME...



...AND IT
PASSED.



I DIDN'T GET MUCH SLEEP
THAT NIGHT. AFTER I SAVED
HIS LIFE, JOKER COULDN'T
STOP LAUGHING.





REALLY COULDN'T STOP.
LAUGHING SO HARD HE WAS
CHOKING, LIKE HE WAS
GONNA...

SO HARD HIS FACE
WENT RED, AND HIS
EYES GOT WET.

I SWEAR IT WAS
COMING UP STRAIGHT
FROM HIS LUNGS, REAL
DRY, NO SPIT AT ALL.

JUST A COUGH.
MAYBE THAT'S ALL
HE WAS DOIN'...

...COUGHIN'.

HARVEY DENT WAS
THE RACKETS IN
GOTHAM.



FROM FRUIT STANDS TO
OYSTER BARS, HE GOT A
TASTE. THE PRICE OF
DOING BUSINESS WAS
DOING IT WITH HIM.

WE-- I MEAN JOKER--
DECIDED TO RAISE THAT
PRICE. I WOULD'VE SAID
DENT IS DEAD. END OF
STORY.



JOKER, THOUGH,
WASN'T LOOKING FOR
AN ENDING. I DIDN'T
GET THAT.





HE SAT IN
A CHAIR FOR
DAYS AND
DIDN'T GET UP.



WE DID WHAT
WE DID, BUT HE
DIDN' MOVE...



FOR
DAYS.



WE MADE
GOTHAM A
TOILET...



...AN'
JOKER SAT
IN IT.



HELLO?

WHY,
HARVEY...

SUCKS
TO BE YOU,
DOESN'T
IT?

OR
DOES
IT?

I NEVER
KNOW *WHO* IT
IS I'M TALKING
TO.



YES, YOU'RE
RIGHT. WE
DO NEED TO
TALK...



FACE
TO FACE...



"...TO
FACE."

WE BOTH
AGREE, THINGS
GOT OUT OF
HAND...

...IT IS THE WAY
IT IS. THERE'S NO
USE PLACING ANY
BLAME EITHER.



THE GOTHAM ZOO



IT'S ALL ABOUT
EGOS WITH MEN IN
OUR POSITION.

SLIGHTS ARE
TAKEN WHERE NONE
WERE *MEANT*, ISN'T
THAT RIGHT?



YOU
GOING TO
ANSWER
ME?

WHA?



OH, MY
MISTAKE... I
THOUGHT YOU
WERE TALKING TO
YOURSELVES,
HARVEY.





I MEAN
TO HAVE
WHAT'S *MINE*,
HARVEY.

AND WHAT
THE HELL IS
THAT?

I'M
ASKING
FOR IT.



GODDAMN
RIGHT YOU
ARE!

ISN'T
HE...



...MR.
FROST?

YOU KNOW THE
HARVEYS, JONNY
JONNY?

WE'VE MET.
HE DIDN'T TELL
YOU?



WHAT A
SURPRISE.



SHELLY?



?

MY WIFE.

YOU DIDN'T TELL ME YOU WERE MARRIED...



BUT THEN, NEITHER DID YOU, HARVEY.



HA HA. I'VE BEEN MARRIED FOR YEARS--



I WASN'T TALKING TO YOU...



I WAS TALKING TO YOU. THERE'S A LOT OF THINGS PEOPLE IN OUR POSITION CAN GET AWAY WITH... **MURDER** BEING ONE...

WIVES AIN'T TWO OF THEM.

BIGAMY IS LIKE TAX EVASION. ONCE A PROSECUTOR HAS A CRIME HE CAN TRY IN THE PUBLIC EYE...











NO-FACE?

YOU LIKE THAT NAME? I THINK IT'S PRETTY GOOD, GOT A REAL RING TO IT-- I THINK IT COULD ACTUALLY DO YOU BOTH SOME GOOD...



HANDS OFF THE MERCHANDISE.

SCREEEE



YOU ARE MY CASH REGISTER NOW, GOT IT?

AND ONE MORE THING...

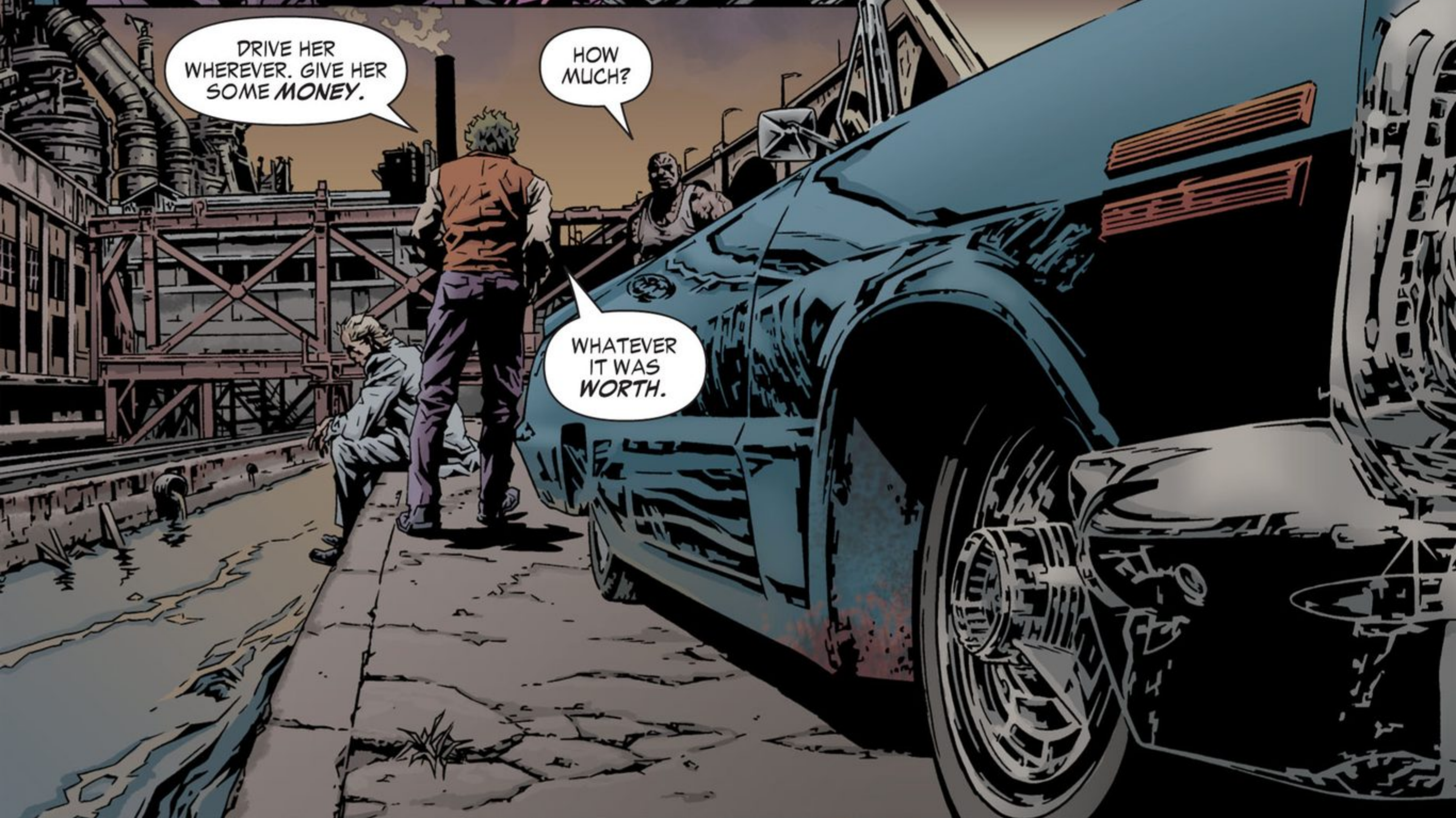
POW!!!

...





CROC...



DRIVE HER
WHEREVER. GIVE HER
SOME *MONEY*.

HOW
MUCH?

WHATEVER
IT WAS
WORTH.



THAT
MAKES US
EVEN, NO?



"JONNY JONNY,
LET'S STAY OUT
TONIGHT."



GRAB ME
SOME BROWN
LIQUOR...

I'M IN
THE MOOD
FOR BROWN
LIQUOR.



WHAT ABOUT YOU, JONNY
JONNY? WHAT ARE YOU IN
THE MOOD FOR?

NAME
IT-- TAKE
IT...

IT'S MY
SANDBOX.

AND
YOU'RE IN
IT WITH
ME.

AH...

YES I
WAS.

IN IT WITH
JOKER.

WHERE
I'D WANTED
TO BE...



...UNTIL I WAS THERE.

SHHH



WHAT ARE WE DOING?



I SAID SHUT UP!



CARL-- SOMEONE'S HERE!

WHA?



WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

WHO...

CARES?



I KNEW THEN, I WAS CRAZY TO WANT TO BE LIKE JOKER...

BECAUSE HE
WAS RIGHT-- HE
WASN'T CRAZY.

YOU
KNOW WHAT I
HATE, JONNY
JONNY?

...EVERYTHING.

MY, MY...

IS IT
YOU'VE
LEARNED
A LOT...

OR YOU'RE
SMARTER THAN
YOU LOOK?

AND BY
THE BY, I'M
NOT SAYING
THAT YOU'RE
RIGHT.

YOU
ARE CLOSE
THOUGH. I'LL
GIVE YOU
THAT.

WHY DO
YOU HATE
YOURSELF?



I--

--DON'T KID
A KIDDER.

SORRY.

DIDN'T I TELL
YOU NEVER TO
APOLOGIZE?

YEAH.

THEN
DON'T.

YOU
DON'T GET IT,
JOKER.

I AM
SORRY.

I CAN'T
THINK OF A
WORSE WAY
TO DIE.

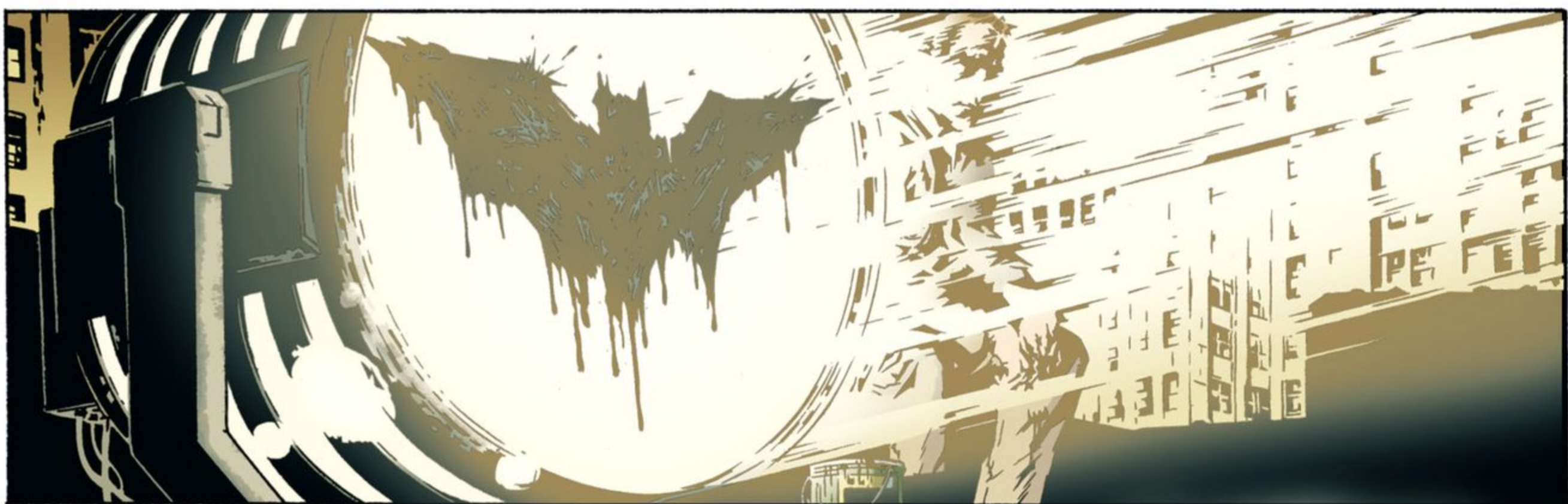
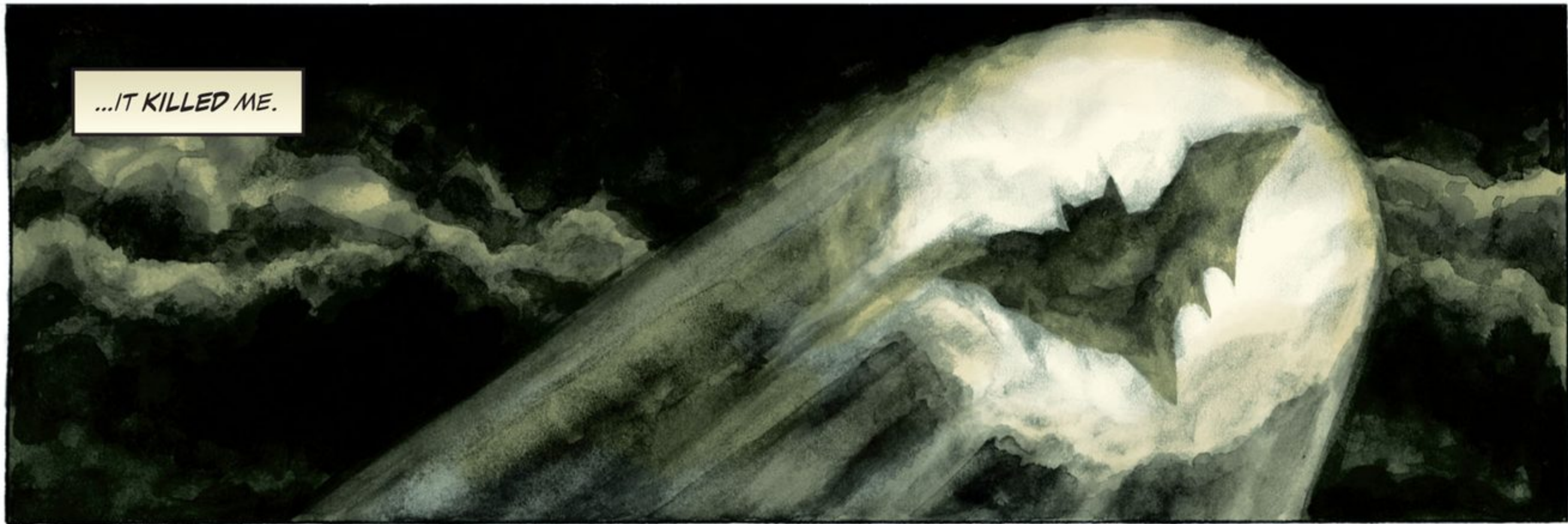
AND I KNOW **ALL**
OF THE BAD WAYS,
INSIDE AND OUT.

MY
FRIEND... JONNY
JONNY...

WHAT I
HATE MORE THAN
EVERYTHING...

IS APOLOGIES.

THAT CONFESSION...
FROM A MAN WHO
NEVER CONFESSED...





PLEASE...



YOU
HAVE TO
STOP HIM.

HE
SAID...



--HE SAID HE
FIGURED OUT A
WAY TO **MURDER**
ONE OF US...

US?



US. NOT
YOU.



HE'S GOING
TO MURDER
ONE OF US.



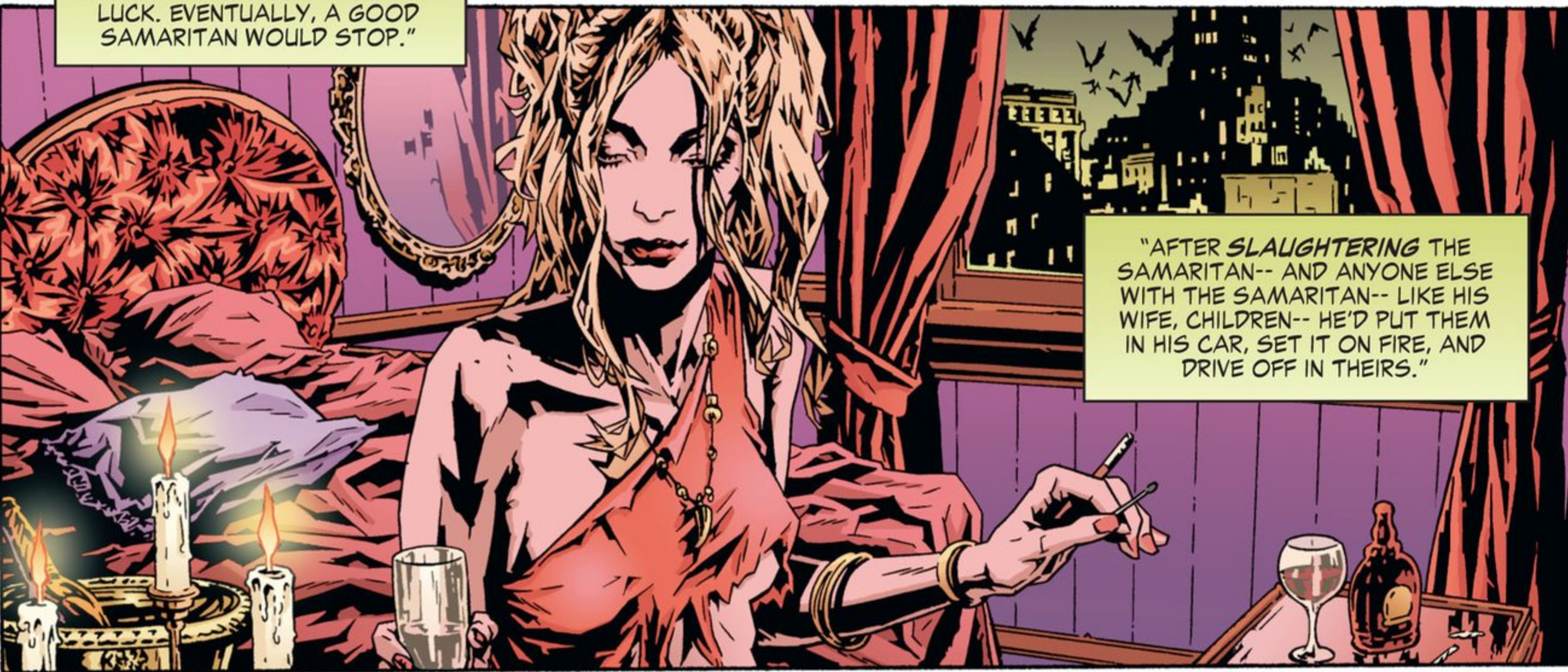
WANT
TO HEAR
SOMETHING
FUNNY?



WHEN I WAS...
GONE, I MET A MAN
WHO WAS OBSESSED
WITH DRIVING A CAR
AROUND THE WORLD
IN ONE DAY.

HE SWORE UP AND
DOWN HE COULD DO IT,
AND HE *TRIED* TO, MANY
TIMES, FROM WHAT I
UNDERSTAND.

"AT THE END OF THOSE FAILED
DAYS... HE'D SIT ON THE SIDE
OF THE ROAD CURSING HIS BAD
LUCK. EVENTUALLY, A GOOD
SAMARITAN WOULD STOP."



"AFTER *SLAUGHTERING* THE
SAMARITAN-- AND ANYONE ELSE
WITH THE SAMARITAN-- LIKE HIS
WIFE, CHILDREN-- HE'D PUT THEM
IN HIS CAR, SET IT ON FIRE, AND
DRIVE OFF IN THEIRS."



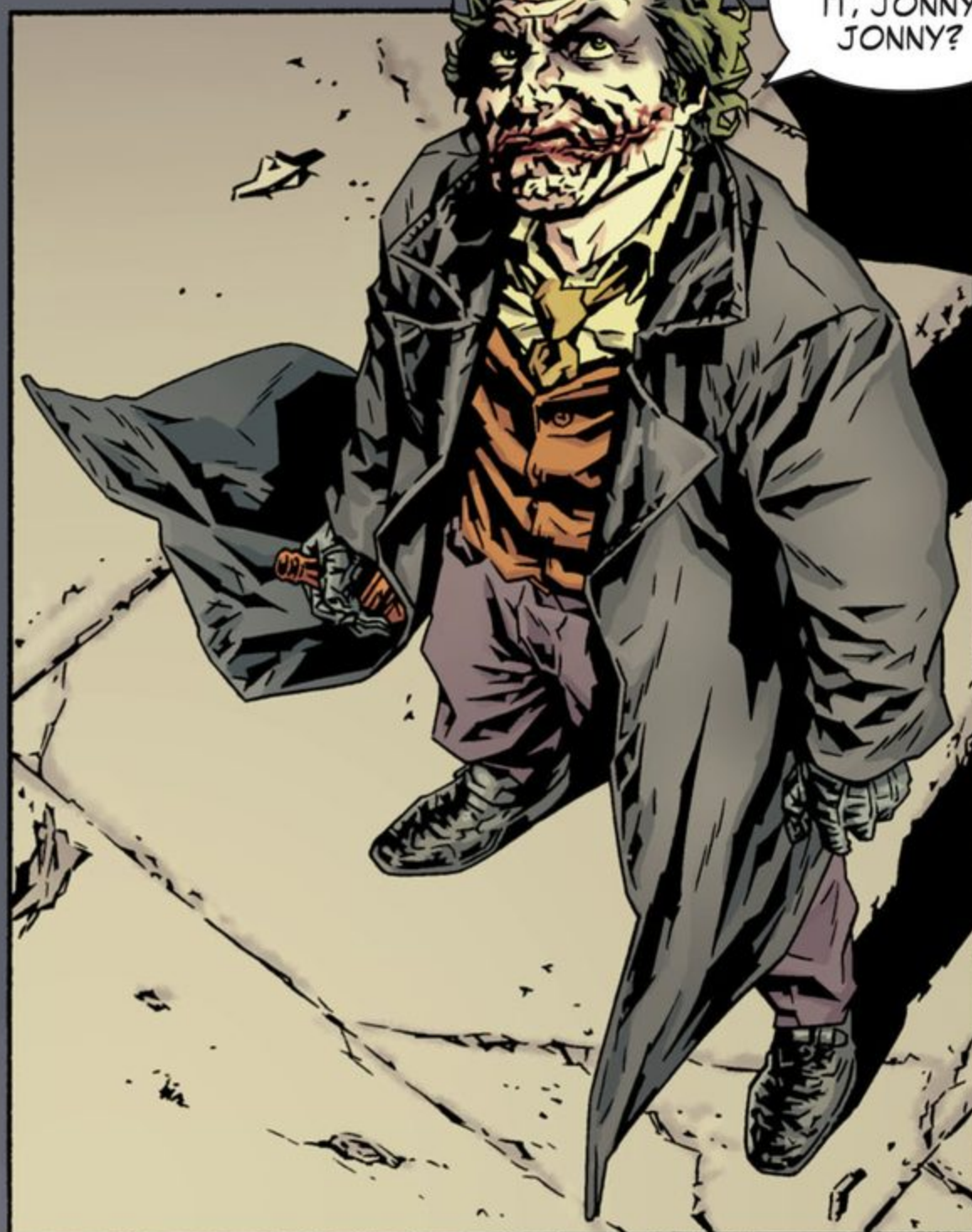
"THEN HE'D FILL UP THE
TANK AND WAIT ON THE
SUN, SO HE COULD TRY
TO DRIVE AROUND THE
WORLD AGAIN."



HE NEVER MADE IT?

NO, HE WAS... **GONE**. BUT THAT'S NOT THE POINT.

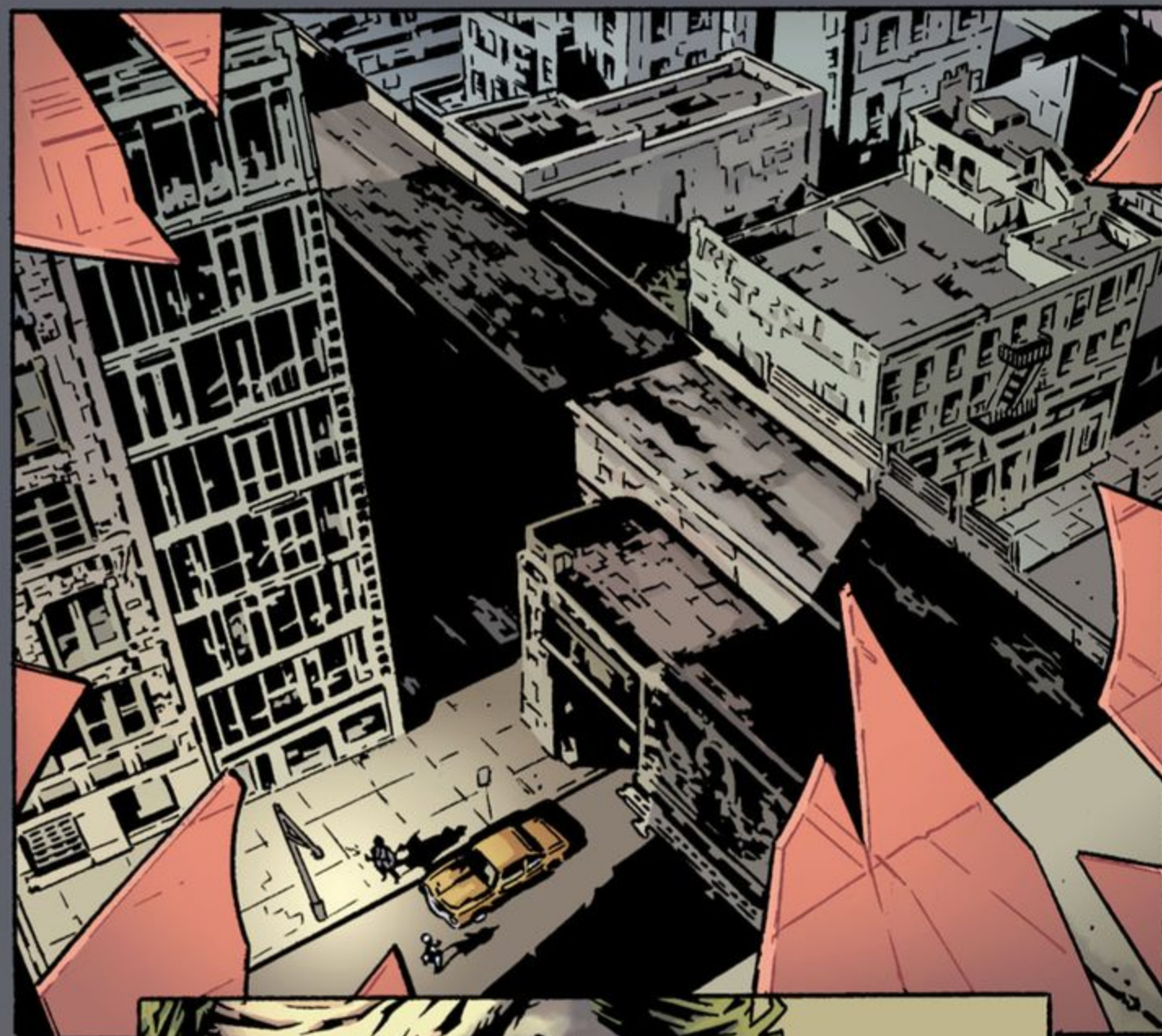
THERE IS ONE, I'M ASSUMING.



SO YOU DON'T **GET** IT, JONNY JONNY?



HE BLAMED THE **CARS** FOR HIS FAILURES.



IT NEVER CROSSED HIS MIND THAT WHAT HE **BELIEVED** HE COULD DO WAS **IMPOSSIBLE**.

I **ADMIRE** THAT.



I **REALLY** DO.



DRIVE, JONNY JONNY.



THAT SONOFABITCH...

WHO? I DON'T GET IT...



OF COURSE NOT-- HE DOESN'T HAVE A FUNNY BROKEN BONE IN HIS BODY.

OH, BUT HE'S GOT HIS HANDS ON THE RUG, JONNY. EVERYTHING-- HE'S LET ME... WE HAVE TO GET OFF THE RUG...



WHAT RUG?



GODDAMMIT-- CAN'T YOU FEEL IT SLIPPING AWAY!?



TRUTH BE TOLD, I WASN'T FEELING ANYTHING AT ALL. IT WAS AS IF, THOUGH MY HANDS WERE ON THE WHEEL...

I WAS JUST ALONG FOR THE RIDE. THINGS WERE MOVING THAT WAY FOR ME.

AND THEN... CROC'S DOOR WAS AJAR WHEN WE GOT THERE.

AND THEN... JOKER
PUSHED IT OPEN. BUT HE
DIDN'T WANT TO.

AND THEN...

I GOT IT.



WHEN WE HEARD
THE LAUGH...

OR WAS IT A
GROWL?



THEN I FELT
THE TUG ON
THE RUG.



FEELING THAT,
I HOPED...



...IT WAS ABOVE
THE ONE I WAS
ALREADY ON.



WE RAN. JOKER SETTING THE
STREETS ON FIRE, DRAGGING
ME-- SPITTING AND SCREAMING
THROUGH TEARS.



THIS
BELONGS
TO ME!

JOKER, I
MEAN.



I WAS
LAUGHING.







AH...

--HA.

OBVIOUS...

AND EVERYBODY KNOWS.

YOU WEAR YOUR *SHAME* LIKE A BADGE, BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE THE *BALLS* TO ACTUALLY PIN ONE ON.



YES...
JUST LOOK
AT YOU...

DESPERATE TO
BE FEARED, YOU WANT
TO BE PERCEIVED AS A
MONSTER, DRAPED IN
BLACK.

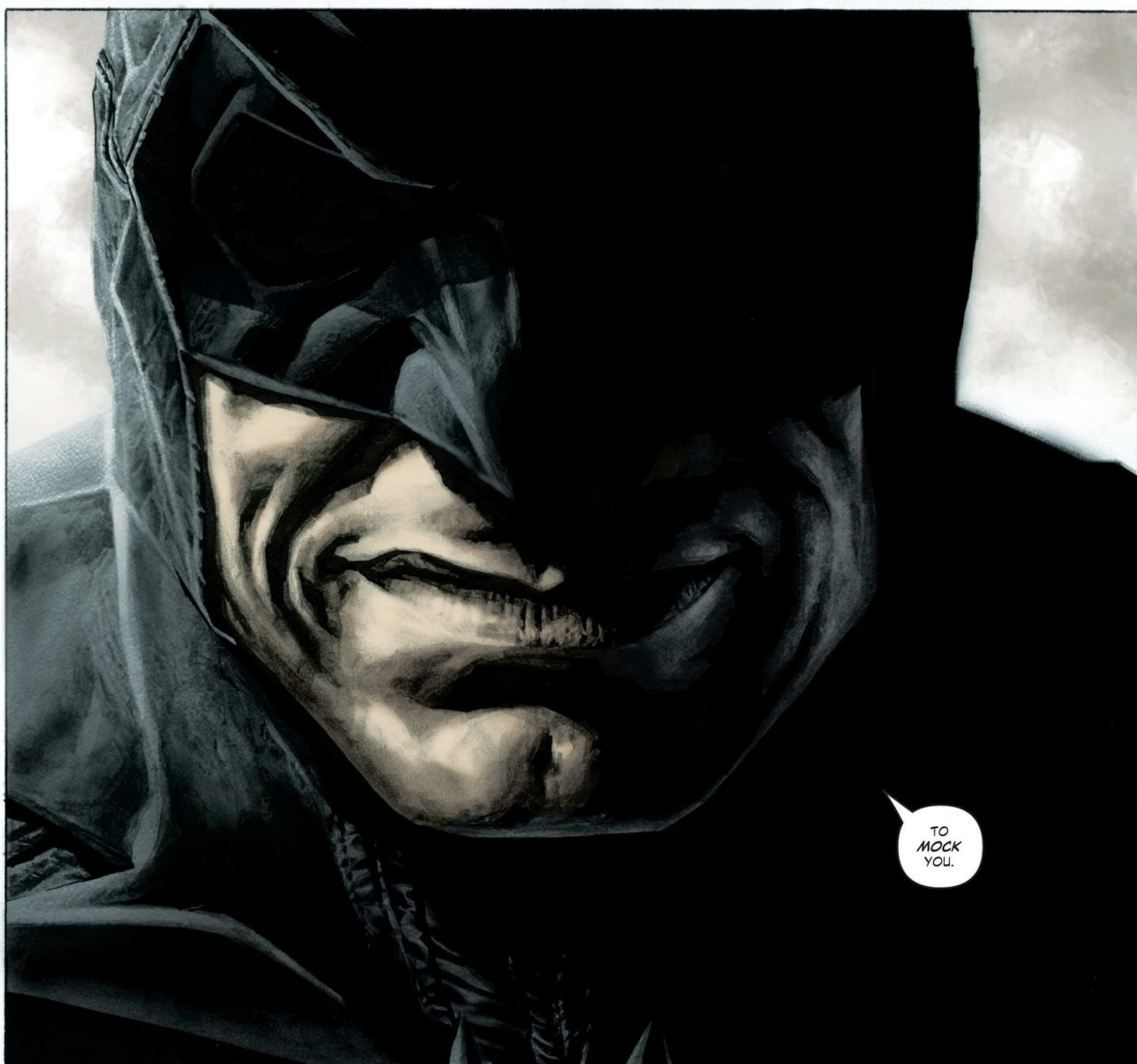
AND
YET...

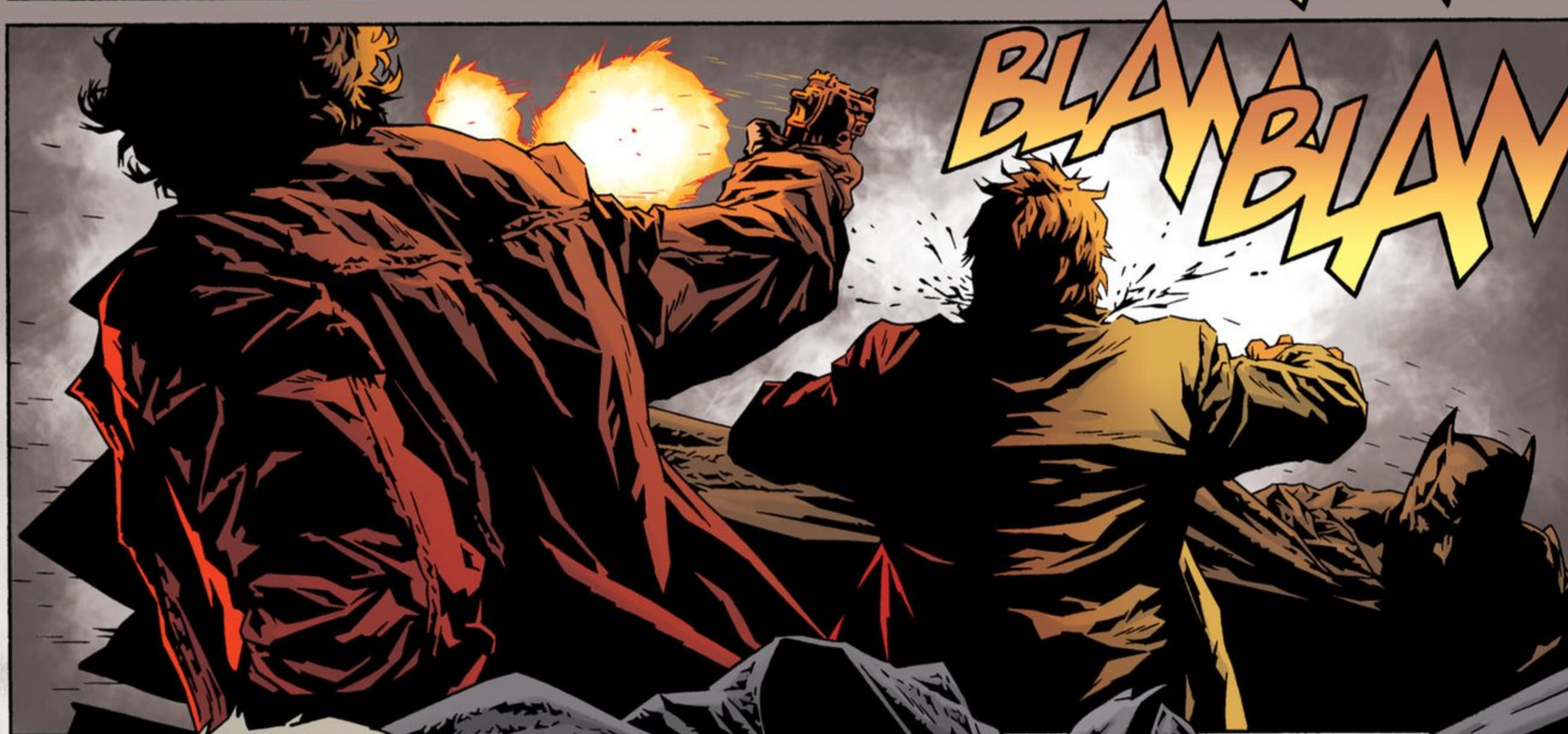


YOU LEAVE
THAT **LITTLE**
WINDOW...



A GLIMPSE AT THE
PERFECTION UNDERNEATH.
OBVIOUS-- THE CHISELED
GOOD LOOKS-- NOT THE
JAW, THE MOUTH OF A
MONSTER...







MY NAME IS JONNY
FROST, BUT I DON'T
HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT,
DO I? YOU KNOW I'M
SOMEBODY...



I'M ON THE TOP
OF THE WORLD,
LOOKING DOWN.

YOU
KNOW
WHAT I
SEE?



DO YOU WANT
TO KNOW WHAT
I SEE?



...I SEE
YOU.

A DISEASE.



ONE THAT HAS
BEEN AROUND LONGER
THAN GOTHAM, THE
CITY INFECTED.



A DISEASE THAT'S
OLDER THAN ANY
CITY. HELL, IT'S
PROBABLY THE SAME
DISEASE THAT BUILT
THE FIRST ONE.



THERE WILL
ALWAYS BE
A JOKER.



BECAUSE
THERE'S NO CURE
FOR HIM.



NO CURE
AT ALL.

...JUST A
BATMAN.



THE END

HELD FOR OBSERVATION

EVALUATIONS FROM BRIAN AZZARELLO AND LEE BERMEJO

Promotional art created in 2008 for the Las Vegas premiere of the film The Dark Knight at the Palms Casino Resort.



JOKER: DARK NIGHT

Proposal by Brian Azzarello & Lee Bermejo

“The news spread through the back alleys to the penthouses; from rooms where everything you’d ever want was for sale, to the confessionals where it was all paid for. It spread like wildfire — or more aptly put — a disease. Because that’s what he is, I guess; a disease that’s infected Gotham City that there is no cure for. A disease that somehow, with the help of god or the devil — pick your poison — had convinced his doctors he himself wasn’t diseased anymore. The news spread. Joker was being released from Arkham Asylum.”

— Johnny Frost

So begins JOKER: DARK NIGHT, a story that pits a newly freed Joker against Gotham’s underworld as he seeks to reestablish his stranglehold on it. Being Gotham, it means he’ll go up against the likes of Riddler, Penguin, Scarface, and Two-Face; all powerful ganglords in their own right. And the turf they’ve managed to grab while Joker was locked up is not something they’re willing to hand over without a fight. But, as this series will illustrate, while they may be scared of Batman, they’re absolutely terrified of the Joker.

We look at this as a bookend to our LEX LUTHOR: MAN OF STEEL. But unlike LL: MOS, Joker won’t be our narrator. We feel this would not only be a mistake, but a disservice to the character; he is insane (which is really important), and his power is derived from absolutely no one knowing anything about what he is thinking.

To this end, our guide into Joker’s psyche will be Johnny Frost, a low-level hood who insinuates himself into Joker’s gang. Like Joker, Johnny is also newly back on the streets, and he sees Joker as a way to establish himself. Johnny’s not stupid, but he is a criminal, so the allure of easy money and power blinds him to the fact that he’s working for a madman. We’ll see things through Johnny’s eyes: Joker’s terrible mood swings, his grand brutality, uncharacteristic moments of kindness, glimpses of clarity, and ultimately why he’s obsessed with Batman.

Batman. The shadow that hangs over Gotham, disappearing when anyone looks his way. Batman. He’s never there, but he’s always around. Batman... Goddamn Batman.

“It was at that moment, the last time I looked into his eyes, that I understood what some people had said was a lie. ‘There would be no Joker without Batman.’ Bull. There would always be a Joker, because there was no cure for him. No cure at all. Just a Batman.”

— Johnny Frost.

The original proposal for the JOKER: DARK NIGHT miniseries, which became the JOKER graphic novel.

Cover art for Wizard Magazine #194, featuring
three of the DC Universe's greatest villains.







Preliminary character studies for Two-Face and the Joker, created in 2005 following the release of the film Batman Begins.



Final cover art for the JOKER graphic novel, originally created as the cover for the first issue of the proposed miniseries.

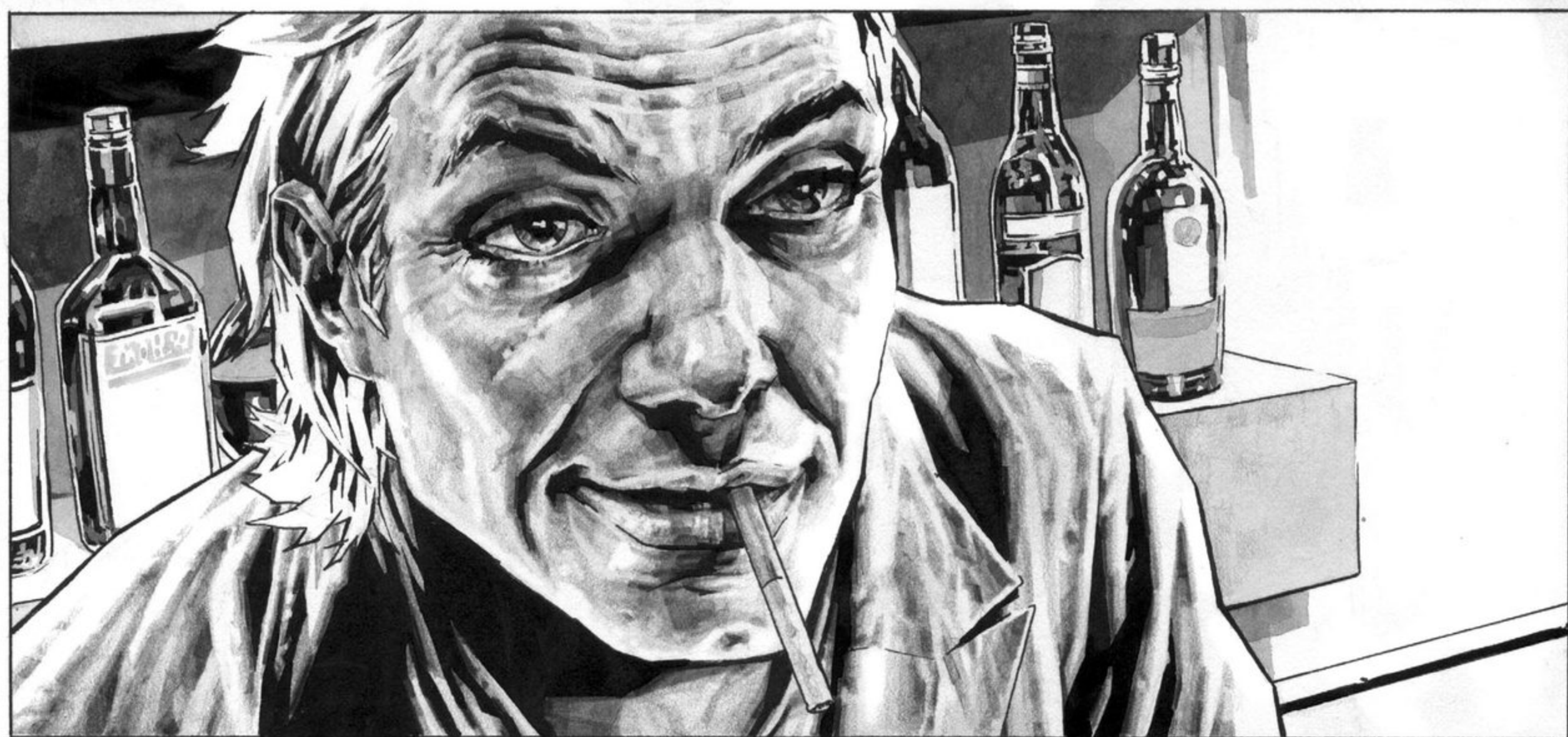
Unused cover art for the second issue of the proposed miniseries.



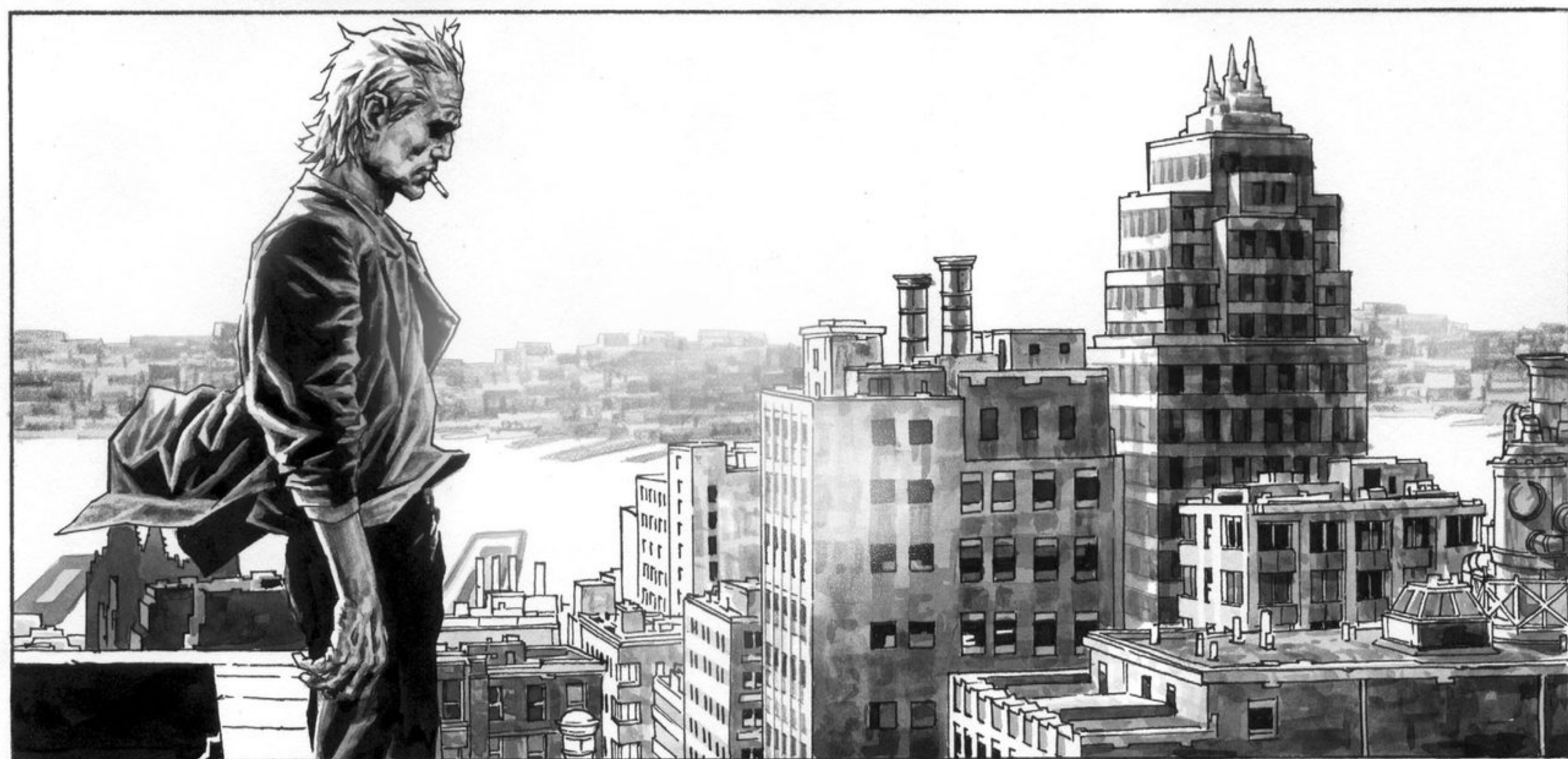




Black-and-white art for page 23.



Black-and-white
art for page 73.





Black-and-white art for page 119.





Black-and-white art for page 120.





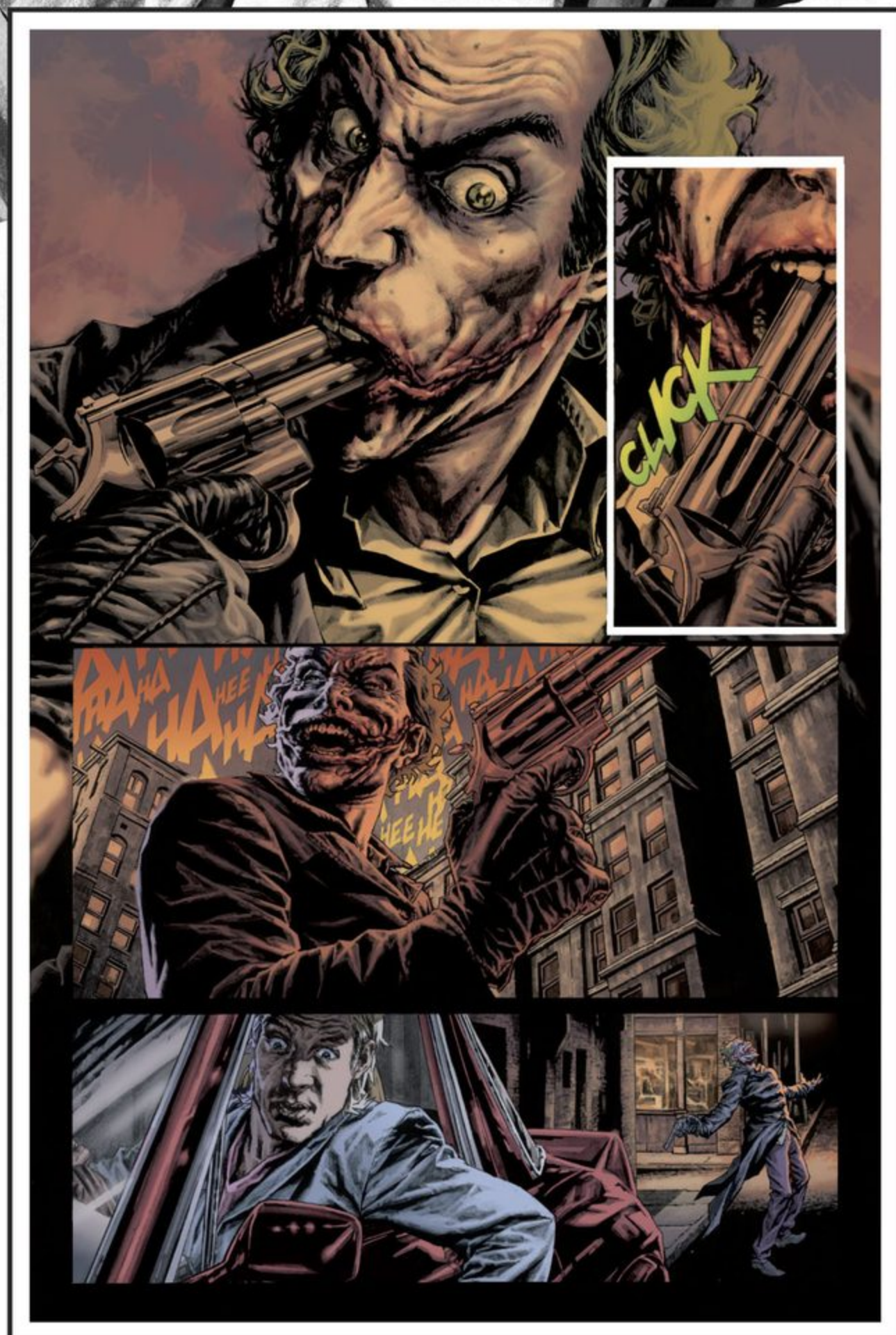
Black-and-white art for page 121.

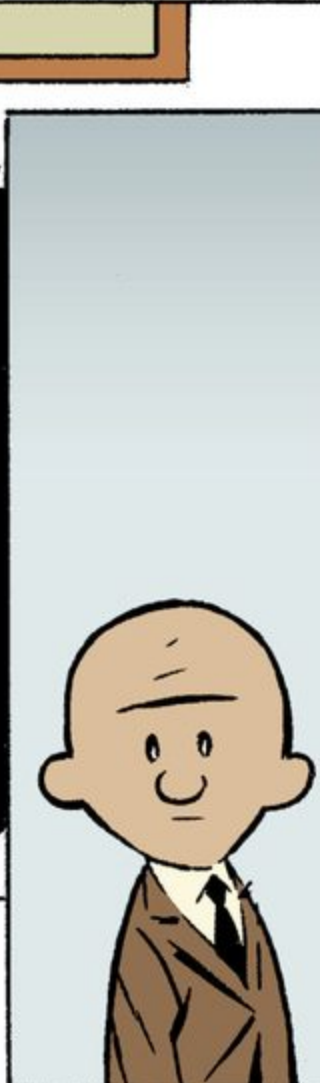
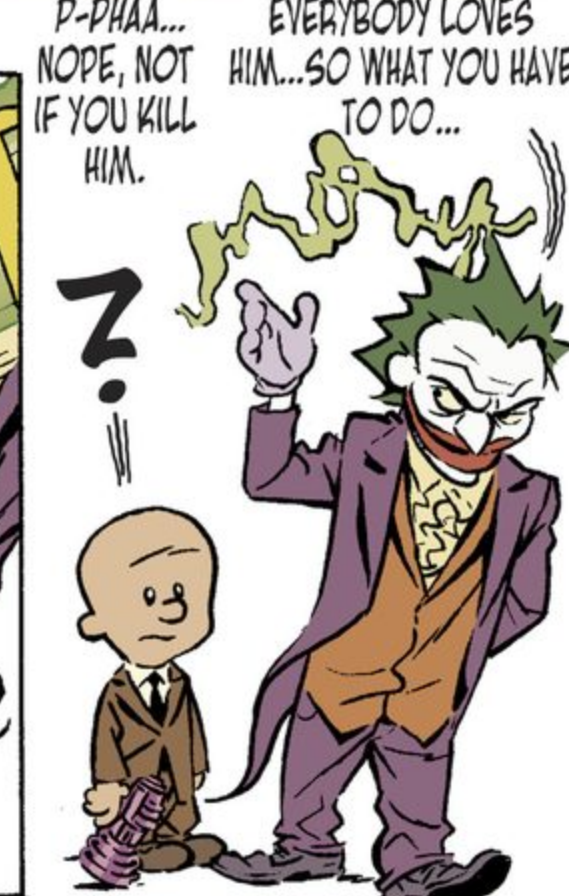
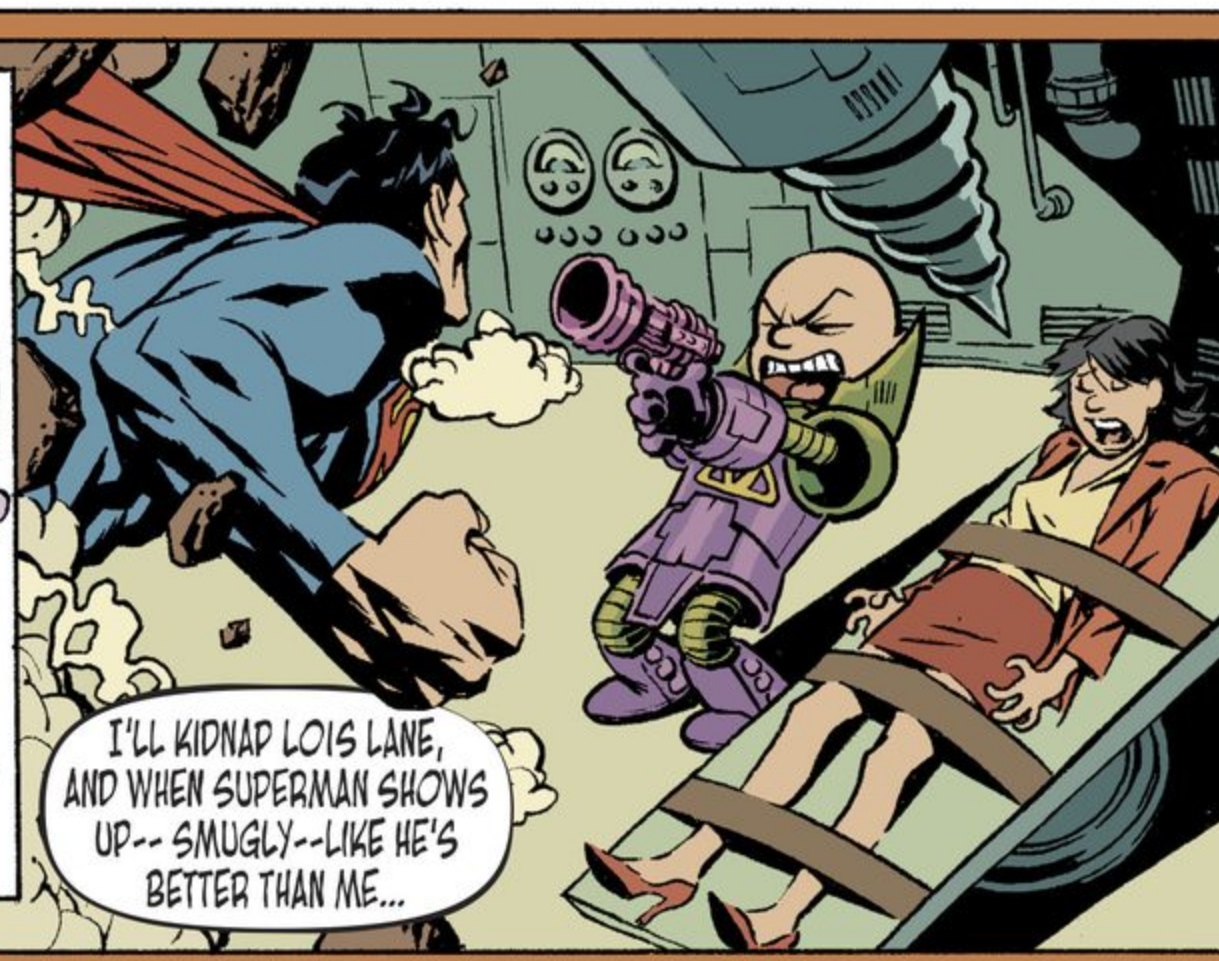
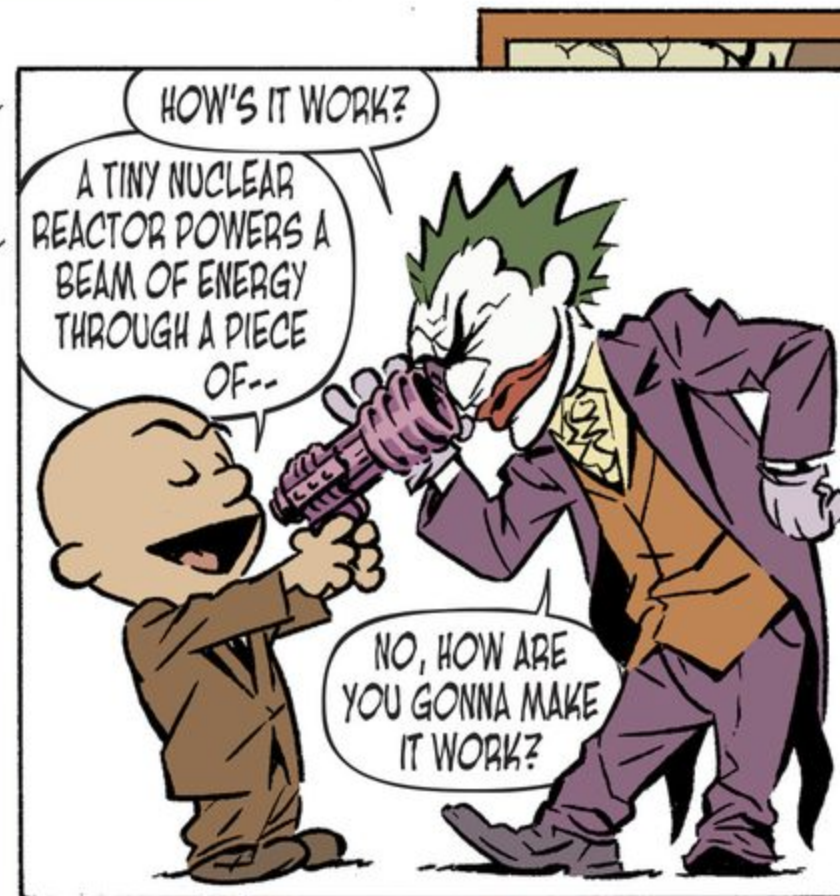
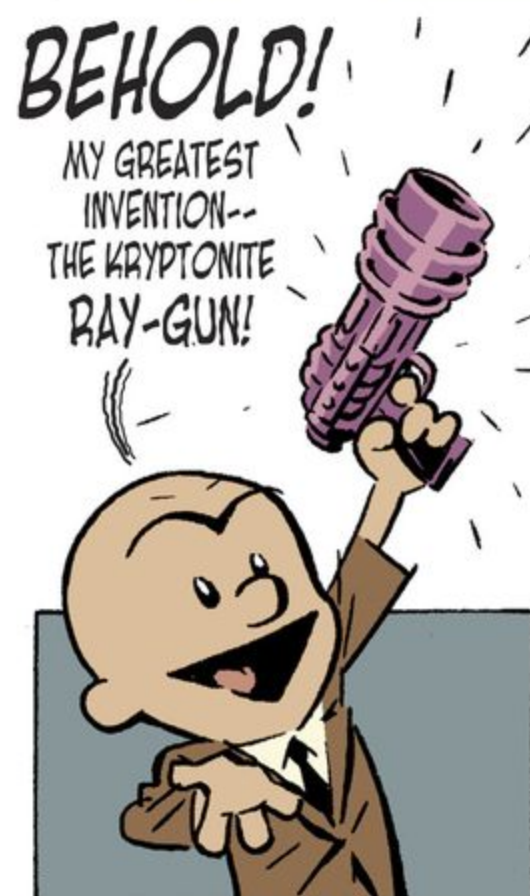
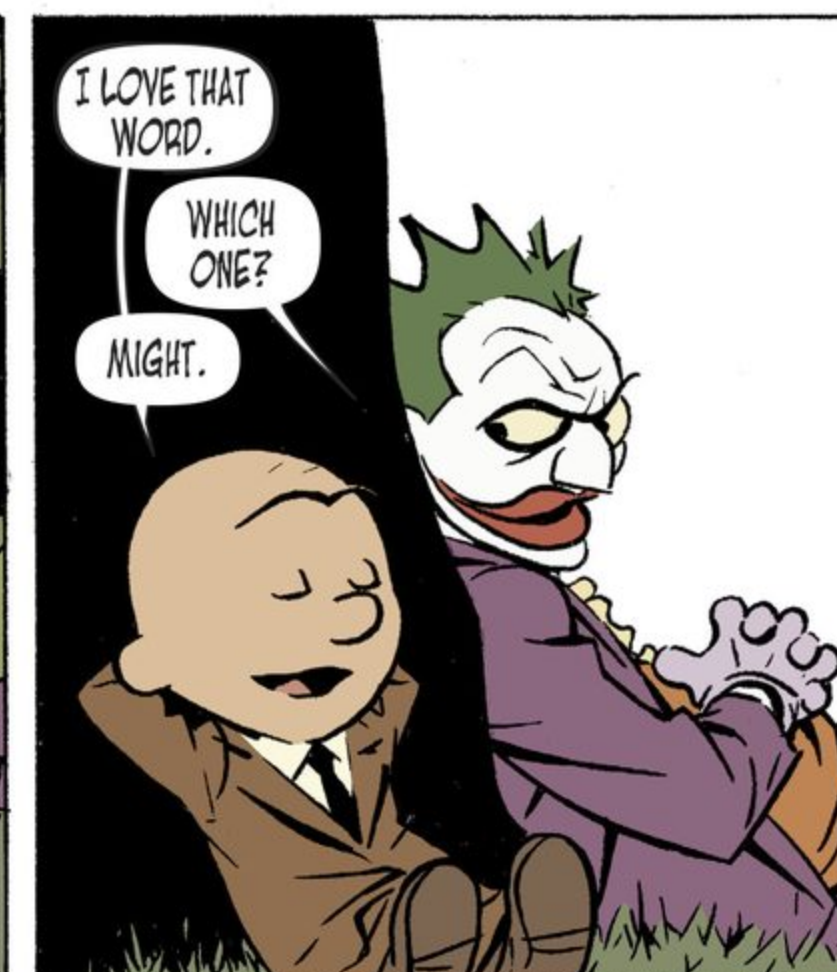


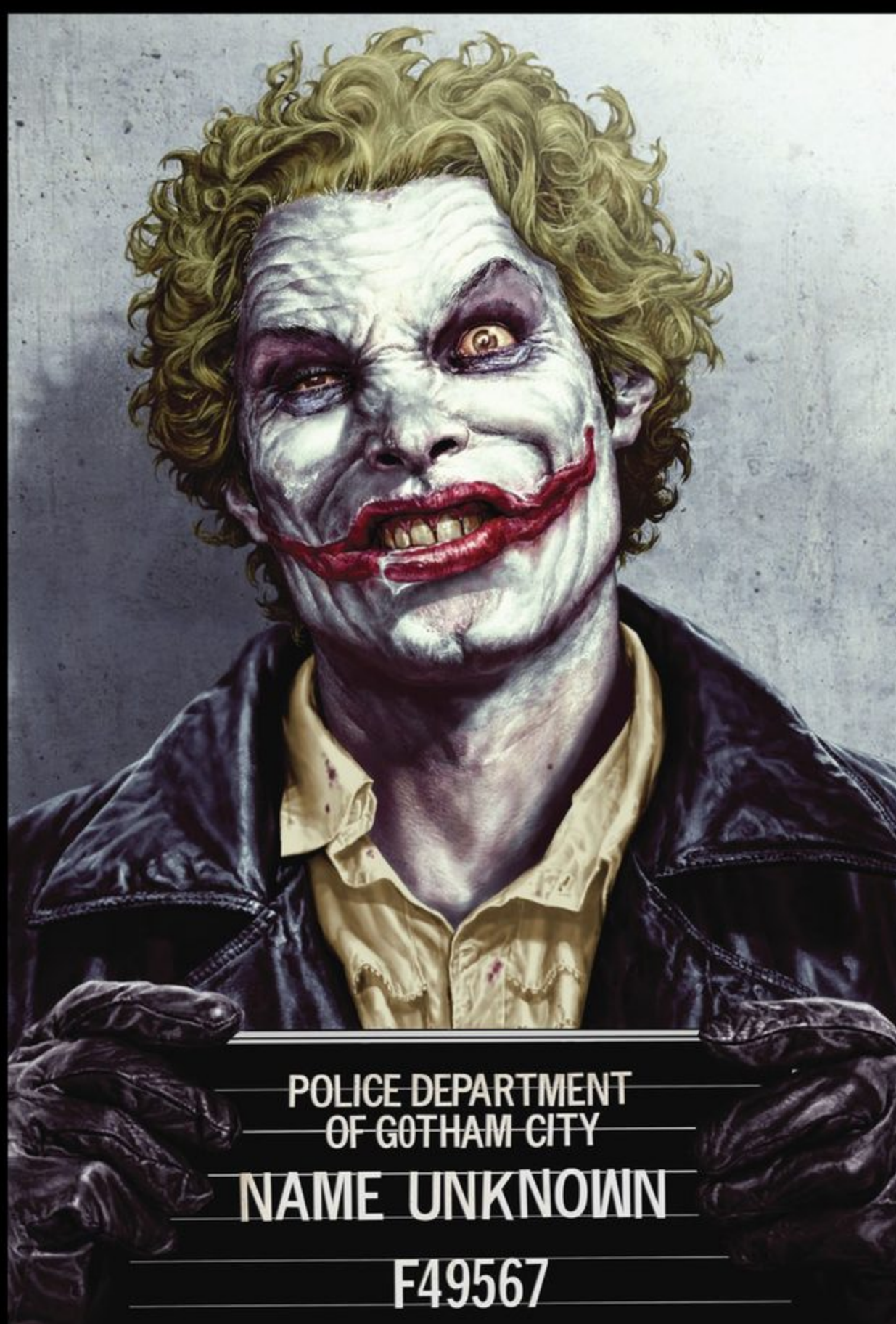




Original and reworked art for page 49.







ABSOLUTE JOKER SLIPCASE cover.

Brian Azzarello has been writing comics professionally since the mid-1990s. He is the *New York Times* best-selling author of **BATMAN**, **JONNY DOUBLE**, **SPACEMAN**, *Moonshine* and the groundbreaking, Harvey and Eisner award-winning series **100 BULLETS**, all created in collaboration with artist Eduardo Risso. His other works include **HELLBLAZER** and **LOVELESS** (both with Marcelo Frusin), **SUPERMAN: FOR TOMORROW** (with Jim Lee), **JOKER**, **LUTHOR**, **BEFORE WATCHMEN** and **BATMAN: DAMNED** (all with Lee Bermejo), a character-defining three-year run on **WONDER WOMAN** (with Cliff Chiang) as well as **DARK KNIGHT III: THE MASTER RACE** (with Frank Miller and Andy Kubert). He hails from Chicago.

Award-winning artist **Lee Bermejo** is the illustrator of the graphic novels **BATMAN/DEATHBLOW**, **LUTHOR**, **BEFORE WATCHMEN: RORSCHACH** and the *New York Times* best-selling **JOKER**, all of which were done in collaboration with writer Brian Azzarello.

Bermejo's other work for DC includes the titles **GLOBAL FREQUENCY** (with Warren Ellis), **SUPERMAN/GEN 13** (with Adam Hughes) and **HELLBLAZER** (with Mike Carey), as well as several dozen painted covers. He also wrote and illustrated the best-selling graphic novels **BATMAN: NOËL** and **SUICIDERS** for Vertigo. Currently working on **BATMAN: DAMNED**, Bermejo lives and works in a small town in Italy.



"A literary achievement that takes its place right alongside Alan Moore's **THE KILLING JOKE**." —**IGN**

**HE WILL STAND OVER YOUR BODY,
WITH YOUR BLOOD ON HIS HANDS,
AND I PROMISE YOU HE WILL LAUGH.**

**NOT BECAUSE YOUR LIFE MEANS
NOTHING TO HIM.**

**BUT BECAUSE DEATH, FOR HIM,
IS THE PUNCH LINE.**

The Joker has been mysteriously released from Arkham Asylum, and he's none too happy about what's happened to his Gotham City rackets while he's been away. What follows is a harrowing night of revenge, murder and manic crime as only the Joker can deliver it, as he brutally takes back his stolen assets from the Penguin, the Riddler, Two-Face, Killer Croc and more.

The scourge of Gotham City reaches new levels of complexity and intensity in this uniquely crafted story from the *New York Times* best-selling and Eisner Award-winning team of **BRIAN AZZARELLO** and **LEE BERMEJO** (**BATMAN: DAMNED**, **LUTHOR**).

Suggested for Mature Readers
dccomics.com

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN...
THIS MONSTER!"

